

Title: Clarifying the Goal

Text: Romans 8.17-30

Theme: Realizing what the real goal of our lives are about.

Series: Living the Cross-Centered life #7

Prop Stmt. God always cooperates with the right goal.

In CJ's book on Living the Cross Centered Life he deals in Chapter 9 with a point that I have attempted to communicate to you in the past two weeks. There is no sorrow that Christ does not understand. But, because of the cross, Christ does more than share our pain, He has done the ultimate in providing our eternal hope. Now, please keep this in mind, because I want to come back to this idea, but I am going to go a long way around John's barn to get there, but I take these little theological and historical field trips to help you connect some dots along the way.

God is an infinite being whose eternal unity is comprised of 3 persons (Father, Son and Spirit). This perfectly unbreakable and perfectly unified relationship drives and affects everything that God has ever done, is doing and will do. They share all of the same attributes and therefore are equally God, though they do not share all of the same responsibilities. In eternity past, the Godhead determined to create the universe in order to create this earth, in order to create a people who will know and enjoy and expand the joy and love that God has in being God.

Just as a loving relationship between a husband and wife is exponentially enhanced and extended in loving, happy and contented children, so the loving, happy, contented relationship that God has as God was exponentially enhanced through his offspring, people, made in His image, made in order to know Him and to make Him known because of their relationship with Him. Now, if you noticed, that what I just said, was an illustration that was actually inverted from its original order. I started with what we know, in order to illustrate what you may not have thought of before. However, the truth is, the loving, happy, contented relationship that God has as God was exponentially enhanced through his offspring, people, made in His image, made in order to know Him and to make Him known because of their relationship with Him. Because this is the design of the Creator, he set it up that a loving relationship between a husband and wife is exponentially enhanced and extended in loving, happy and contented children. Our pleasure in having and raising children helps us understand his ultimate pleasure in us.

Sin marred that original design, and the life and death of Christ provided the means by which we can be restored to the relationship that God originally intended for us to have with Him. But, what kind of a relationship is that? What did God have in mind for us? When God made us, what was the original plan and design? How were we set up to function in harmony with him? Unless we understand what the original design was, then our idea of restoring a right relationship is going to be fuzzy. God had enough love to share. God designed us to share in his glory and in his delight as being God.

So, everything that God is doing is to restore our standing or our position with Him (justification) and because of that God is therefore restoring our life or walk with Him

(sanctification) which is a life that is lived with the other members of his family/kingdom. Life for the believer as God sees it is now is for the purpose of getting us back into our original condition of being holy like Him and satisfied in Him. God has committed Himself into putting you back into the original condition of being holy like Him and satisfied in Him. God has promised that He will do that and God keeps His promises.

God's goal for your life is not comfort and convenience. His goal for you is the conformity of your very being (to Christ) and the contentment of your soul (in Christ). Why? Because he is helping you live with the perfect purposes for which He created you. His perfect purposes for you, coincide perfectly with His perfect purposes and plans for this world. One day we will live, breathe, run, walk, talk, relate and love all with people who will, just like us, be perfectly conformed to the character of Christ. We will love without self-interest, we will be deliriously satisfied in Christ and in the resting of our souls in Him will have no fear of the future, no fear of the enemy, no reason or instinctive response to look over our shoulders, will never worry about what is being said about us behind our back, and will never, ever be distracted in our worship of God or in our learning about God. We will never have to go back and ask forgiveness for we will stop harming people with our words, we will never have to confess our wrong motives to God, will never offend another person, never say something sinful in a moment of weakness, will never wake up doubting the love and grace of God, will never be concerned about the other shoe falling.

Right now, He is teaching us to live like that. Right now, God is helping us move in that direction. God is preparing you for life in His coming Kingdom.

Many of you have thought of the Christian life as the following:

- 1) **Get Saved**
- 2) **Follow the Rules**
- 3) **Go to Church to help you follow the rules**

Implied is: if you follow the rules then life will have comfort and convenience and that comfort and convenience that you experience will attract more people to get saved and follow the rules because every one wants comfort and convenience. After all, you want God on your side. You want God to help you when you need a job, when your kid gets sick, when you are facing a tragedy, you want God to be able to come through for you and make things better. In that sense, church is thought of as a weekly meeting for a multi-level marketing company, where you get the salespeople together to pump them up with motivational speeches and give awards. But instead of selling vitamins, jewelry, kitchen products or make-up, the church is selling the gospel. And therefore, should find the best selling techniques available to accomplish greater targeted goals. Watch what happens when that view is accepted. Assuming that people will be attracted to the positive, upbeat, success stories of life, we feel a burden to put these sorts of stories in front of people. Why? We want them to know that being a Christian makes life better. So, we hear the stories and listen to the applause and watch the heads in church that nod

in agreement, and privately wonder, what do I do with my pain? What do I do with my disappointment? Am I the only one whose life is still influenced by questions and doubts and sin and evidences of self-centeredness? But, I don't want to talk about it, or admit it, because it would be so depressing for the sales-pitch. Besides, I would be admitting that somewhere along the line, I was not following the rules because if I really followed the rules, then I would be a little further along on this having a great problem-free life.

So, we are left with this divided existence, where we are not allowed to talk about the real stuff because if we do, it will in some way discredit the gospel, so we pretend that things are fine, and figure that maybe the promises just don't work for me, but I don't want to admit it. That is what happens on a more private level. On a public level, the true measure of a church is gauged by how well it follows the rules. So, people in the church measure each other by each other's level of commitment to following the rules and the schedule. When talking to people from other churches, you are tempted to find out what their rules are, as they are tempted to find out what yours are, and you determine, who is more committed, and more spiritual by what rules they promote and enforce.

Your assessment of the greatness of the church is determined by the rules. But, what are the rules? For some the rule is AWANA. (and we could make a monstrous list of rules) I will give you an example of a rule that I grew up with. A good church always gives a public invitation so that people can walk the aisle at the end of the sermon, come forward, and pray to receive Jesus into their hearts. Then we can announce this to everyone who is there and we can get fired up that we have just recruited another person into the marketing plan. Therefore, since a good church does this, a good preacher is able to get people to walk the aisle and a good sermon will bring them forward. If the sermon is not good, or the preacher is not good, then people will not walk the aisle. Don't try to find that in the Bible, because it is not there, but many of us lived as if it was.

I was a youth pastor in a sizeable church in a not-so-sizeable city. An evangelist (one who was known for being able to get people to walk down an aisle) came to the church for a week of meetings, and because he had been saved from a life of drugs, I was able to get him into many of the local high schools to tell his story of abuse, which opened the doors for him to invite these kids to come to church on Friday night, where he would tell the rest of his story, which he did. He promised all of these kids free pizza afterwards. Almost 5,000 people showed up that night. I bought out the entire city's pizza joints and had delivery trucks lined up down the street dropping off boxes of pizza. At the end of his message, he gave a very persuasive invitation, and hundreds of people came forward and prayed to receive Christ. We got the names and addresses of all of those people, and many of those were given to me. I lined up some guys in my youth group and we spent the next 6 months visiting or attempting to visit every single person. After all, they were now saved, and they needed to get into church in order to grow. After 6 months of going to every home, there was not one person who ever came back, not one person who had any interest in following through. Someone took a picture of the event that night, and it looks impressive with thousands of people, but in terms of accomplishing what it said it accomplished, I knew better. Tell the personal story of how Jesus got me off drugs, pack out the church, get them down the aisle, feed them pizza, and call it a smashing success.

What if following the rule puts you on a collision course with the Bible? I could not reconcile the results of that night (great) with the teaching of Scripture on perseverance, fruit and faithfulness. But to express skepticism about the rule would be tantamount to admitting that I was a flaming liberal.

In the minds of some, they would justify the whole thing by saying, well, look at how many people prayed to receive Christ. At least they will go to heaven now, boy won't they be surprised to know that was all they had to do – and they did it? By now, most if not all of you understand these issues and grasp the underlying problems, but I am seeking to expose our tendency to eliminate the real message of the cross by replacing it with our own self-made version of Christian growth. Our self-made version of Christian growth, cannot handle the real problems and challenges of life because it is incapable of dealing with our hearts.

Now, I have thrown a lot of stories and loosely related ideas at you. Now, I want to tie them together and help you understand and appreciate the gospel perhaps even more.

When you accept the unbiblical model of:

- 1) Get Saved
- 2) Follow the Rules
- 3) Church exists to help you follow the rules

Then you can expect church to emphasize the rules. Even though we know that you cannot get saved by following rules, and we even say, that **becoming a Christian is not about a religion it is about a relationship**, we do not even understand the full implications of what we are saying. Usually what we mean by that is that the way you become a follower of Christ, is not by going through church ceremonies or trusting in your religious activities (aka Roman Catholics). Christianity is not about trusting in the church, it is about trusting in Christ. But, for many, that is where the disconnect takes place and we think that once you become saved, then you need to follow the rules so that all of the good things that are supposed to happen to you, will indeed happen to you. And when they don't, and you are following all of the rules, then you begin to assume that there are secrets or keys or formulas (prayer of Jabez or secrets of the vine) along the way.

Listen carefully, the gospel, as defined by the Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans includes, predestination, election, calling, justification, sanctification and glorification. All of these doctrines are connected and influence each other. If, your sanctification is rules and performance driven, it is going to affect the way that you view the actual means by which you become a believer. If your sanctification is not cross-driven, then eventually, your justification will not be cross-driven. In this model, the message of the cross, is the message about how to become a believer. But, if you have already been there and done that and bought the T-shirt, then you think, I don't need to hear another message on John 3.16. I need something else to help me keep the rules or help me do things better, because I keep having some problems.

What is so refreshing to understand and what is so needful to grasp and what is so satisfying and assuring is the message of the cross, which ironically is the very thing that some sort of assume that we don't need. The means (the cross) by which we become a believer, is also the means by which we grow as believers. That is why, CJ entitled his book, "Living the Cross-Centered Life" and subtitled it: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing.

What do I do when my wife is diagnosed with cancer?

What do I do when my child dies?

What do I do when I find out that my teenage daughter is pregnant?

What do I do when...(fill in the blank)

If, the goal of Christianity is comfort and convenience, and following the rules is the means by which you get there, what are you left to believe? If something bad happens to you or to someone you love, YOU are not following the rules!!! That, my friend is not living a cross-centered life; that is living a fear-centered, performance-driven, rule-driven life, self-centered life and mislabeling it by calling it Christianity.

What we need is to go back and look again at the cross and the entire picture. Why did Christ come to the earth and live and die and rise again for us?

God made us to enjoy His glory and to live in the Kingdom of His Son. But we wanted our own king – ourselves! We wanted to rule, and so we rejected the good and kind and true King and in His place we put ourselves. We rejected so that we could have our own hell. And with that decision, we brought upon ourselves an enormous series of consequences. We broke apart the relationship that God wanted with His people. We tried to go it alone, and alone is what we have gotten. We are sinners who could not in any way rescue ourselves from the infinitely serious problem that we made for ourselves. The way Christ was treated on the cross is what I deserve. Being on the cross would be justice for me. Dying and going to hell would be fair. People spitting in my face, and stealing my car, and turfing my yard, and speaking lies behind my back, are all in one sense, much better than I deserve, I deserve the cross and I deserve hell. But, Christ took my hell. He took my cross because He took my sin.

I have nothing to parade before God and offer to him as a payment for the debt my sin caused. I am undone, empty, completely spent of all righteousness and hope that I could in any way contribute to my spiritual bank account. Every day that I live, I sin and apart from the cross would only add to my condemnation and judgment.

God did something about this horrific problem. He sent Christ to pay the full penalty for my sin. He sent Christ to live a perfectly righteous life so that when I trust in Christ as the only Savior for my soul, he takes the credit for my sin and gives me the credit for his righteousness. He takes my hell and gives me heaven. He takes my aloneness and gives me a Heavenly Father, an older brother, the Holy Spirit and thousands of brothers and sisters who though broken and wounded like me, are also being trained to live in and rule

in the coming kingdom of King Jesus. Since the full aspect of the kingdom of Christ is not here, yet, we still live with the residual affects of the curse and presence of sin. This world is still a violent and dangerous place to live. Sickness and problems abound and they affect us. But, I know that they are temporary. I know that one day, they will be gone. My goal is no longer to find as much comfort and convenience in this world, it is to spread abroad the honor and fame of Jesus Christ, so that people can be prepared for his coming kingdom. I am assured that no matter what problem I face and sorrow I experience, that nothing can be compared to what Christ experienced for me. He took the greatest injustice for me. Any injustice I face, while real and hurtful is not done to destroy me, but is part of God's sovereign plan to bring about the kingdom of His Son on the earth.

Let me jump ahead for a bit. My understanding of the books of Daniel and Revelation, lead me to conclude that this world is going to get much worse, before Christ literally returns and establishes His kingdom. I personally believe that there is an event known as the rapture, that will take place before the actual 7 year period of tribulation begins. Now, if we accept the fact that the world is going to get worse, a whole lot worse before Christ returns, and if we assume that this is all part of His plan, then does it make sense to set the ultimate goal of our hearts on our own comfort and convenience? If, in the midst of this sin-cursed world, God gives you a measure of comfort and convenience – then, thank God for it, enjoy it, and bless His name. But, do not measure your spirituality or God's love for you based on that.

If God calls you to go through difficult days, do not think that something strange is happening to you, that suffering and sorrow are in some ways inconsistent with Christianity, because, the Hero of our faith, the Champion of the Church died on a cross for us. And we are called to follow Him. Should we not expect the winds of this world to blow in our face? YES!! And they do, but they don't blow that hard everyday. Some days more so than others. And on the days when the winds of adversity are not as strong, we are doing better than we deserve because we are not abandoned, forsaken, and left alone without hope. And on the days when the winds of adversity are stronger, we are still better than we deserve because we are not abandoned, forsaken and left alone without a Savior and High Priest who is unmoved by our experiences, but who faced the ultimate tornado of adversity all by Himself and knows deeper than we will ever know.

The cross therefore, replaces fear, with the true basis for faith. No condemnation results in no separation, even if there is some suffering in between.

What is the goal? Living with Christ in His kingdom! What is God doing now? Preparing me for that! How is He doing that? By helping me rid myself of my pride and self-reliance and to find my eternal joy and satisfaction in Him. The implications of the cross – humility, Christ-reliance, repentance, full pardon and the eternal satisfaction of God are the truths that help me rid myself of pride and self-reliance and see that if God is eternally satisfied with God, and God is eternally satisfied with the payment for my sin, I can rest and truly relax in His wise and Sovereign and nail-scarred hands.