

The End of You

1Cor 1.17-25

For a change of pace, we're going to do this one from back to front, beginning with the application and working backward to the text. The Corinthians are in a sort of self-imposed exile, holding onto the beliefs and practices of their former life. I thought it might be interesting to see what happens with such "voluntary exiles."

We'll begin in Jeremiah during the Babylonian captivity. The people of God have been removed from the Promised Land, and transported into a foreign country. God is correcting His people Israel, who have insisted on worshipping foreign gods for generations. Essentially, if they want to make themselves "foreigners" to God, then God will make them true foreigners. This is *forced* physical exile, but it flows from their *voluntary* exile. Yet, having strayed, and even while being corrected, God holds out to them the promise of forgiveness, if they will only repent and turn to him. If the Corinthians, and we ourselves, will return from our "voluntary exile" in the world, then God holds out to us this same promise of forgiveness. We return from exile when we acknowledge only Christ as our King.

Jer 31:15-20 ^{NET} The LORD says, "A sound is heard in Ramah, a sound of crying in bitter grief. It is the sound of Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are gone."

¹⁶ The LORD says to her, "Stop crying! Do not shed any more tears! For your heartfelt repentance will be rewarded. Your children will return from the land of the enemy. **I, the LORD, affirm it!**

¹⁷ Indeed, there is hope for your posterity. Your children will return to their own territory. **I, the LORD, affirm it!**

¹⁸ I have indeed heard the people of Israel say mournfully, 'We were like a calf untrained to the yoke. You disciplined us and we learned from it. Let us come back to you and we will do so, for you are the LORD our God.

¹⁹ For after we turned away from you we repented. After we came to our senses we beat our breasts in sorrow. We are ashamed and humiliated because of the disgraceful things we did previously.'

²⁰ Indeed, the people of Israel are my dear children. They are the children I take delight in. For even though I must often rebuke them, I still remember them with fondness. So I am deeply moved with pity for them and will surely have compassion on them. **I, the LORD, affirm it!**

There is weeping in Ramah. Rachel, which is the Church – those whom God called out – Rachel mourns for her children, who are the children of the Living God, true

followers of Jesus Christ. They have been carried away into bondage. They are separated from the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey; they serve another king, in another land. And this has all come by their own hand. ***They have done this to themselves.*** They forgot who they are, and then they forgot the God who's name they bear, the One who brought them up out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and delivered them into freedom. But they would not have God as their King... *they would not even have their freedom.* They wanted to live under *another* king. They wanted to be like the *other* nations, and have an earthly king to rule over them. They wanted to take pride in their ***wealth***, and the ***splendor*** of their cities, with worship places designed and made with human hands.

Samuel warned them that they would serve that earthly king with the sweat of their brows, offering up their sons and daughters to serve him; they would give him the BEST of their crops, and the BEST of their flocks, and the BEST of their years. And for WHAT?? What are the wages of sin, besides death and dust? What do we have to show for it all but emptiness and pain?

Many of the wives of this congregation, ***right now***, are crying out. They are in pain and in tears; there is ***weeping*** in Ramah! And they will not be comforted! Their husbands, some of you men sitting here, are fighting windmills; you're chasing earthly treasures while your families are left open to attack. You're in voluntary exile, from God and from your loved ones.

In 1st Samuel, David chose a voluntary exile as well. He took things into his own hands; he made what seemed a prudent choice to preserve the families of his men against Saul by moving out of Israel, and living among the Philistines. But by living among them, and making them think he was one of them, David was called into battle to fight alongside them against Saul and the Israelites. David and his men left their wives and children behind, only to have their wives and children captured by the Amalekites during their absence. ***If only the battle they went to fight was the Lord's.*** But it wasn't... They stood on the plains of Armageddon, ready to wage war against the people of God, taking sides with the enemies of God, because David forgot who he was, and he had grown tired of waiting for the kingdom that God promised him. In the end, his plan to keep his men and their families safe failed, and his men cursed him for it. But in the despair of the moment, in his failure, ***David was driven to reach the end of himself***; and then he turned to God to know what to do; and God delivered his enemies into his hands.

This situation may look familiar to many of us. No matter how we may try to justify it, no matter how prudent our choices may seem to us, no matter how

practical our solutions are, no matter how we may try to fool our families, fool God, and even fool ourselves, we find ourselves fighting in our own strength, with our own wisdom, and we CANNOT win the battle that way. We cannot join in the practices and mindset of the world, relying on ourselves and worldly techniques to solve our problems. When we add self to Christ, we void the message of the cross.

Listen carefully,

Unless you ***know the end of you***, the purposes for which God created you, you will live in vain. And until you ***reach the end of you***, admitting your complete inability to do anything apart from Christ, you cannot fulfill those purposes.

Why is that? Because until you reach the end of you, you will not turn to God. *Until you reach the end of you, you WILL NOT turn to God.* You will *refuse* to do it. You'll think of God as your **final** avenue, your **last** resort. You will only turn to Him after you've admitted defeat. But you are so proud, so full of yourself and your capabilities, that you will NEVER admit defeat until you've exhausted every other avenue, every other recourse you have. *Tell me I'm mistaken about that. Call me a liar.* What keeps you from being radically transformed is your own refusal to yield to God. ***You will not admit defeat.*** You are still convinced there is another way, a way that YOU can control, so that YOU get all the glory. Before you call me a liar, show me the fruit of the Spirit; show me what Christ has *worked in you*. Show me how attractive and glorifying it is to God. *Now, I'm no better. I'm right there with you:* embarrassed, angry, defensive, stammering.

Being convinced of our own abilities, we search for anyone who will confirm our baseless suspicion that the Gospel is inadequate, or that the promises of God are conditioned on our own performance, or that the ways of the world are as fruitful as the ways of God. We learn and follow the world's success principles; we gain organizational and people skills so we can get ahead. We ***believe*** wise and learned men *who don't know God*. We believe them when, *like the Jews* of the 1st century, they tell us it's all about learning to work *smart* and not just *hard*. We believe them when, *like the Greeks* of the 1st century, they tell us it's not about *what* you know, but *who* you know – as long as WHO you know is a man, **and not the God-Man**. They tell us to take another path, a wider and easier path, a more satisfying path, the one *everyone else* is taking. But **God** says the gate is *narrow*, and the way is *hard*, and *few* find it. Who would you rather believe? Who ARE you believing?

Non-believers may admire our religious “convictions” but all the while they believe it's nonsense; maybe they've told you it's foolish to wait on God, or

unwise to depend on Him for your daily bread. After all, *God helps those who help themselves*. You think about your goals and your dreams and congratulate yourself on your foresight and planning. You think you're practicing delayed gratification, and you pat yourself on the back for your self-control. All the while you're striving to gratify your fleshly desires – you're just satisfying them *later* rather than *sooner*. And on the way to satisfying yourself, you'll sacrifice your family, your integrity, and your identity in Christ. *How's that working out for you?*

What I've said may not be true of everyone sitting here today, but unfortunately it's true of enough of us that I cannot keep silent. If it's not you, it's someone you know. I'm begging you to END IT! You may be asking, "End what?" *End your self-reliance and self-idolatry! Reach the end of you as David did – flee to Christ* for your strength and your wisdom. Stop living by your own abilities, with your own wisdom, under your own strength. END IT! Admit your ultimate defeat *today*, right now. Don't wait. Look down the road five or ten years and see the wasteland that awaits you there. TURN AWAY! *Leave* that path, and turn to God! ***Not for SALVATION – you've got that.*** Turn to him to be made holy, to live *for Him alone*. Why should your sanctification be any different than your salvation? It's ALL of God; it's ALL by grace; and it's ALL in His hands, right now.

To be eternally saved, we CANNOT come to Christ in our own strength. We come with NOTHING in our hand except our *desperate* need. Like Rachel in mourning, we wept back then, and we would not be comforted. THEN we came to Christ. THEN we were comforted. THEN we were refreshed and restored. We laid down our life at the feet of Christ, because we realized that only *one thing* was needed. At that moment, like Stephen, we saw the heavens open up and we saw Christ high and lifted up, seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. We *died to self* that day, and we were *resurrected again* in Christ. Behold, all things became new. Like prodigal sons and daughters, we returned to our Heavenly Father.

Unfortunately, the parable of the prodigal son ends there, with the celebration. What happened afterward? When the prodigal son finished his daily work, did he wander over to the promontory and gaze at the valley below? Did he fondly remember his wasteful days, and the pleasures of his wantonness before he squandered his inheritance? Did he still secretly cherish those days in his heart? Did it cross his mind as he gathered the wheat, and fed the sheep, that he'd seen other places and enjoyed other pleasures in the world than this mundane existence? Did he long for days gone by when he could spend his inheritance however he wanted? Remember, he came home *humiliated*, humbled under God's mighty hand, *convinced* that it would be better to be a servant in his father's house than to

continue living as he had been. ***How long did his conviction last?*** What about ***yours?*** Is YOUR conviction just as strong today as when you first came to Christ? *I must admit that mine waivers.* Maybe yours does too. I don't always *seek God first, and His righteousness.* Why NOT? Why *wouldn't* I want to do that?

Having laid down our life at our conversion, why do we take it up again as if it was our own? Why do we spend our freedom as we wish, squandering the rich gifts and blessings that our heavenly Father gives us? We read, ***"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in Jesus Christ who loved me and gave himself up for me."*** And we *believe* that's how it should be, ***absolutely.*** We *desperately* hope it's true about *us.* And yet we live as if it wasn't true at all. We sing, ***"I am nothing, I am nothing, without you."*** And then we *live* as if we could be *anything* we want, *anything* we set our heart to, ***without Christ!***

We get frustrated by our failures and our inadequacies. It infuriates us to fail, and so we lash out at others. ***We hurt the ones we love, because we love ourselves more.*** We throw temper tantrums like a 3-year old because things aren't working out according to OUR plans, by OUR wisdom, under OUR strength. *People aren't responding as we want them to:* Our wife isn't meeting our needs. Our husband isn't doing his job. When we ask them to jump, our children don't ask "how high?" Our parents don't give us everything we want. Our boss doesn't consider our needs. Our friends aren't supportive enough. Our pastors aren't fixing our problems to our satisfaction. We planned it all out in our heads, but ***none*** of it seems to be playing out according to our plan...

Gee. *How can that be?* Let me repeat:

Unless you ***know the end of you,*** the purposes for which God created you, you will live in vain. And until you ***reach the end of you,*** admitting your complete inability to do *anything* apart from Christ, you cannot fulfill those purposes.

Why is that? Because, until you reach the end of you, you ***will not*** turn to God. Instead, your itching ears will seek out the wise, the educated, and the persuasive people of ***this world*** to tell you THEIR truth, and advise you how to live THEIR kind of life. ***If you are not standing on God's word alone, then you have not reached the end of you.*** Instead, you're living a lie. The **truth** is that you're a Christian. The **lie** is that you're an American *impersonating* a Christian. Americans are all about IMAGE, about how they look to others. Christians are all about how they look to **God.** We need to be true to who we are. We need to stop living a lie; we need to stop deceiving ourselves, and *listening* to deceivers.

THAT is the church at Corinth. Paul *never* doubts their salvation. He *never* questions whether they are children of God. He challenges them to **remember** it; and to **live** like it. Please turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 17-25. At this point, I pray you'll see where all this has been leading. Paul is comparing those who are called, to those who are *not* called, **and the differences are profound.**

^{NAU} 1Co 1:17-25 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹ For it is written, "*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.*" [Isa 29.14]

²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? [*the clever sophist or smooth-talking con-man*] Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,

²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ: the power of God and the wisdom of God. [WHY?]

²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Look at the chart. Notice the contrast between non-believers and believers:

<i>Non-Believers</i>	<i>Believers</i>
<i>Those who are not called</i>	<i>Those who are called</i>
those who are perishing	those who are being saved
the cross is foolishness	the cross is the power of God
have the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever	have God, who destroys men's wisdom, and dismisses their cleverness
have wise men, scribes, and debaters (sophists)	have God, who has made foolish the world's wisdom.
by God's wisdom, they did not come to know God by their own wisdom	the preaching of a foolish message saved those who believed
are Jews who want signs, and Gentiles who want wisdom;	Are Jews <i>and</i> Gentiles who see <i>Christ</i> : the power and wisdom of God.

Look at verse 21. In God's wisdom, by God's decree, in GOD'S plan of salvation, the wisdom of men WILL NOT bring us to God – we CANNOT know God by the wisdom of men. So why in the world would we listen to non-believers, or use their wisdom? We wouldn't. *And yet we do*. I suppose if their tirades against the church stayed outside the church, it might be easier to “just say no.” But worldly wisdom and cynical attacks have invaded the church. And at Corinth, some of this error was being advocated by fellow believers, wise and educated men, very eloquent speakers. And these men were misleading other believers, embellishing the gospel, probably infusing it with Greek Gnosticism and home-brewed mythologies. Maybe they didn't do it knowingly and maliciously, but sincerity won't excuse falsehood. It doesn't matter if we intentionally deceive with malice aforethought, or if we UN-intentionally deceive with the best of intentions. The result is that God's truth is replaced with a lie.

The standard of truth for a believer is NOT how wise something sounds, or how smart the person talking seems to be, or how persuasive the argument is. Our standard of truth is God's Word alone. But as you heard earlier, *we won't turn to God or to His Word until we've reached the end of ourselves*.

We know from other passages that the Jews were preaching works and temple worship as the means of salvation. They believed that WE ARE ABLE to save ourselves – but God says WE ARE NOT ABLE. We know that the Greeks were preaching that the resurrection is nonsense, and that the path to salvation comes by self-denial and will-power. So the Greeks also believed WE ARE ABLE to save ourselves – but God says WE ARE NOT ABLE. *Who are we going to believe?* The folks on the left side of that chart, or the *right* side? I only ask, because today those same misleading voices of human wisdom, who speak very eloquently, can still be heard in the halls of our seminaries and churches, on Christian TV and radio. It's not being done maliciously and knowingly. Rather, our godless culture has invaded the church today as it did in Paul's time. The lies are just as rampant today as they were back then. We must learn to distinguish biblical truth from worldly falsehood. In this brief passage, Paul gives us two keys to help us do that:

¹⁸ For the **word of the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is **the power of God**. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.”

To those of us who believe, the *word of the cross is the power of God*. And the *power of God in the word of the cross*, is effectual – it DOES something. *Verse 19*.

It destroys the wisdom of the wise and it sets aside the cleverness of the clever – literally, it *rejects the understanding of the human intellect*.

That's the first key: we must have an absolute understanding and firm conviction concerning the word of the cross. What happened there? Why is it important? *We'll get into that next week.*

The second key is in verses 23 and 24. ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,* ²⁴ *but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ: the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

We *preach* Christ crucified. Preaching, as we discovered last week, is designed to evoke a response. It is provocative. It **PROVOKES** those who hear it for the first time. And it stimulates and motivates those who already believe it. We **PREACH** Christ crucified. We preach to those who are called, whatever their background, culture, or mindset. Those who are called **see CHRIST** through the message of the gospel. They see him as Stephen saw him, high and lifted up, seated at the right hand of God. And when they see Christ, they see the power and the wisdom of God; and so they **RUN** to him. Like Mary, they sit at his feet; they realize it is the *one thing needed*; they come to him to be instructed. Mary knew, just as **WE** know, that there is **POWER** and **WISDOM** in Christ crucified, in Christ risen, in Christ ascended, in Christ glorified. Christ is our King, and Head over all. Do you want **POWER**? Do you want **WISDOM**? Then **FLEE TO CHRIST!**

Why do you sit there in your own strength, kicking against the goads, running for the finish line without the ability to finish? Why do you sit there in your own wisdom, bewildered for answers to your questions, torn as to which path to take, as you pursue earthly treasures that cannot last? **FLEE TO CHRIST** for *his* strength which *never* diminishes. You will rise on wings of eagles, and never faint. In him are found all the treasures of heaven, all the wisdom and power of God, all that is necessary to run your race and finish strong – if you will only *reach the end of you!* Surrender to him, for heaven's sake! Lift up your eyes and see him there! Let go of your yoke and put on *his* yoke. If you've been fighting in your own strength, with your own wisdom, *then you must be weary from all your labors*. Your yoke has become heavy, because you made it with your own hands. **Put it down**. Take Christ's yoke upon you – it's easy; his burden is light. *Learn from him*, and you will find rest for your souls.

Flee to him NOW, so that you may *discover the end of you*, the purposes for which God has called you into fellowship. *He made you for Himself*. Love Him like you *know* that. Love Him like you *need* that. Love **HIM** – and not the *world*. I *beg* you.

TIME OF PRAYER

Confession of sin,
Submission to God,
Consecration to the work,
Praise and Thanksgiving to God.

References: Jer 31:15-20; Rom 6.23; 1Sam 8; 1Sam 27, 29, 30; Joh 15.5; Mat 7.14; Luk 10.42; Act 7.55; 2Cor 5.17; Luk 15; Mat 6.33; Gal 2.20; Isa 40.31; Mat 6.19; Mat 11.28-30; 1Joh 2.15.