

The Value and Work of Every Christian

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Each September, the 39th Street church of Christ offers a wonderful opportunity to individuals both near and far to come under one roof to hear God's glorious word, and to come to know or to share the sweet fellowship that exists in Christ.

Those unable to attend can both hear and see lessons which were presented no matter what corner of the earth they may live in. The benefits of this lectureship cannot and will not be measured in time as we know it, only in eternity will these efforts be fully recognized.

I am grateful for the invitation to be a part of this lectureship and hope in some way to support its success. I am grateful to the elders of this congregation for the subject of this hour; "The Value and Work of Every Christian". ***"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles"*** (Acts 8:1).

The Value of Every Christian

There is an element of the work of a preacher that is sometimes misunderstood and needs to be clarified from time to time. Of course you know that most of our public preaching is done to members of the Lord's church; therefore, we are preaching to people that we know and love and want them to go to heaven, and every faithful preacher has certain clear goals in mind. Now, I want to introduce two passages that, in a general way, express that goal and likewise can lead to a misunderstanding.

"If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with the horses...?" (Jeremiah 12:5). In other words if you cannot stand the test in times of calm, what are you going to do when the storms come? We preach to members of the church to strengthen them that they can contend with the horses. Again, ***"Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned"*** (Hosea 7:8). What is a cake not turned? It is half-baked, raw on one side and burnt on the other. We do not want half-cooked Christians; we want Christians that are well-done, cooked all the way through.

Do you see, brethren? We preach Christianity at its loftiest; a goal to strive for. That you and I will not achieve sinless perfection does not mean that we lower the standard. But if in the process of strengthening, of cooking you on both sides, you come away feeling as though you are not important, and that you have no value--that's wrong! And it is certainly not our intent.

Never for a moment believe that you have no value, there is no such thing as an invaluable member of the church of Christ. Now, that is not to say that there are not some members who treat themselves as though they have no value!

The one talent man never saw himself as being valuable, he never asked himself a single time, "Where can I be useful?" While others labored and grew he sat idle, frozen in place (Matthew 25:24-30). Beloved, this is a brand of Christianity that has its share of followers – they wear the name but never know the joy. Fear grips them--"**I was afraid**" (Matthew 25:25). 1 John 4:18 is absolutely true; "**...fear hath torment**". These Christians will never see their full value because they will not use what ability they have. Why? Because the dread of hell, not the longing for heaven, motivates them!

Others like Demas have the thorny ground (Luke 8:14). Valuable and useable Christians who labour for the kingdom, for a time just like Demas did (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24), but all the while the world is working on them, slowly choking the spiritual life right out of them (2 Timothy 4:10). Many times it is visible, and you helplessly watch it happen. Rarely does one fall away suddenly, it is usually one step at a time, and all the pleading in the world seems to fall on deaf ears, as they exchange eternity in heaven for that which is temporary and perishing (1 John 2:15-17).

Brethren, if you are a child of God you are more valuable than all the combined wealth in the world (Matthew 16:26). There is a telling account provided in Matthew 12:46-50 that emphasizes that truth; "**While He yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But He answered and said unto him that told him, who is my mother? And who are my brethren? And He stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother**". Listen please, Jesus is not showing a disrespect his physical family; He is elevating his spiritual family!!! If you are a child of God you are special. Folks may hate you (John 15:18-20), speak evil of you (1 Peter 4:4), they may even kill you (Matthew 10:28), but they cannot take away who and what you are. You are a child of the living God, now act like it!!!

The Work of Every Christian

Our text finds Christians facing persecution and they were scattered abroad. Jerusalem is still the center of evangelistic activities (and would remain so for several more years until Antioch in Syria would become the hub of evangelism); therefore, the apostles remained in Jerusalem. But every Christian both in the first century and today share this in common. They were called by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), to a work (Matthew 20:1-16).

In Matthew 20:1-16, the householder goes out early in the morning (6:00 a.m. being the first hour) and hires labourers for his vineyard. Brethren, isn't it wonderful to find those who are willing to bear the heat of the day? Now, I know that (to their shame) they grumbled, and we certainly have our share of grumblers in the church today, but this is a work that someone has to do, and it is a privilege. Would you bear the heat of the day without grumbling?

The householder goes out again at the 9:00 A.M., noon, 3:00 P.M., and 5:00 P.M. and there is this that is recorded; **“...they were standing idle”** – now that was in the marketplace, but when you come into the vineyard, it is to work. Now, having said that, there are some who were idle out there (in the world) and want to be idle in here (the church).

There is an impressive lesson taught in Luke 13:6-9. A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit and found none. For three years he came seeking fruit and found nothing, until finally he said unto the dresser of the vineyard; **“...cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”** Please notice that the fig tree was where it should have been, just not doing what it should be doing. The plea of the dresser, **“Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down”**

Beloved, we are expected to bear fruit (John 15:1-2). We need to be careful that we don't find ourselves in the right place, but not doing what we should be doing. Just maybe I am speaking to some who have been idle in the church. If that is the case, leave the idleness behind and roll up your sleeves and let's go to work for the master.

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16). Every Christian is a supplier to the body. What can you supply?

1) Knowledge of the scriptures. Brethren, ignorance is just plain deadly. **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”** (Hosea 4:6). **“I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing”** (Hosea 8:12). It is sobering to find Christians who have been members of the Lord's church for many years and yet they are plagued with doubt. God does not want us to live in doubt and uncertainty. Notice with me just a few of the prophecies given concerning the death of Christ.

1. **“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me”** (Psalms 22:1)?
2. **“...They pierced my hands and feet”** (Psalms 22:16).
3. **“They parted my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture”** (Psalms 22:18).
4. **“Into thy hand I commit my spirit”** (Psalms 31:5).
5. **“He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken”** (Psalms 34:20).
6. **“Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me”** (Psalms 41:9).

Do you know who wrote those prophecies? David, a shepherd boy who became a king, a thousand years before the event, before crucifixion was ever practiced as a means of capital punishment. That we might know! That we might know that God is, that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God (John 1:14; 18), the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14) and that the Bible is the inspired word of God.

Beloved, if you are plagued with doubt, there is only one place where true faith can be built, the Bible, God's inspired word (Romans 10:17). But maybe someone is thinking, "To be a serious student of the scriptures you have to invest time and effort, and I am so busy that I just do not have the time". There is a scene that teaches us a lesson about making time, if we have the presence of mind to receive it.

Jesus is a house guest in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Martha is busy serving the guests, but with growing resentment, Martha is an angry and frustrated woman. Have you ever been around an angry and frustrated woman? It is not pretty! Finally unable to contain herself any longer, Martha said, ***"Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall never be taken away from her"*** (Luke 10:38-42).

Does it really matter if the dishes pile up, or the grass doesn't get cut? Maybe the children may have to skip a sport, or you may need to learn how to say no to extra activities that consume your time. Whatever is necessary, because if we are too busy to study the scriptures, we are too busy! There is one thing that is absolutely needed, choose the good part that shall never be taken from you.

2) Take seriously the responsibility of evangelizing the world. To illustrate this point, I want to take you to a strange account that emphasizes our responsibility. Paul and Silas are in the city of Philippi, and a girl possessed with an evil spirit follows them saying; ***"These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul being grieved..."*** (Acts 16:16-18). Why was Paul grieved? What this girl said was true – brethren, it was not what was being said that grieved Paul; it was who was saying it! To make known the manifold wisdom of God is our responsibility (Ephesians 3:10-11).

In a time where so many wear the name of Christ, but abuse the teaching. In a time where vast multitudes are caught up in a false religion of hate and violence. In a time when the world has so preoccupied the thoughts of the people that God only occasionally crosses their minds, there is a crying need to preach the gospel of Christ, there is a Saviour! John said it so beautifully; ***"For we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world"*** (1 John 4:14). We need to point men to Jesus Christ.

I want to draw your attention to two verses that say so much along this line. ***"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man"*** (Colossians 4:5-6).

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without". Know the value of a soul, for those you are walking toward are without. What does it mean to be without? It means to be without Christ; therefore, without salvation, without hope. Precious souls, who if they remain in that condition, face the terror of the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:11), as He will come in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who know not God, and have not obeyed the gospel of Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

“Redeeming the time”. Buy up opportunities. Folks we are only living in such a small window of time, leave a tract, give someone a tape, tell people that Jesus died for them. Jesus said, **“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish His work. Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the field; for they are white already to harvest”** (John 4:34-35). We all need to feel that sense of urgency.

“Let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt, that you may know how ye ought to answer every man”. The language of a soul winner is so important. Understand, that bluntness may be required at times, but never meanness. Listen to II Timothy 2:24-26, **“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will”**. No mission of the church is more important than carrying the gospel to a lost and dying world; let us take that responsibility seriously!

3) Build up the body of Christ. Undeniably every Christian, positive or negative, impacts the congregation they are a member of; that God wants each member to supply to the strength of the body goes without saying. But the serious question is how can each of us build up the body?

Our physical presence – we all know that the Bible says not to forsake the assembling together of ourselves (Hebrews 10:25), to put the kingdom of God first (Matthew 6:33). There are obvious reasons: If one forsakes the Bible study, they miss opportunities to study and grow. Likewise, it is ignoring the congregation’s obligation to feed its members (Acts 20:28). If you forsake the worship, you are not showing the proper reverence toward God (Psalms 89:7).

In addition, the Lord’s church is a spiritual family. What do you do when family members keep turning up missing? Of course there is an immediate concern! While it is true that there are members who condition us not to expect them, you never stop worrying about them. Brethren, if we put members who do not attend all the services in a file folder, that file would be marked “unreliable”. Absentees do not make a congregation stronger; you simply cannot depend upon them.

A proper attitude – there is no useful place in the body for an arrogant or haughty attitude. Those things the world uses to catalog or segregate people into classes, such as: wealth, power, fame, physical appearance, race, nationality, family, etc., must not be granted room in the church.

In the church all are to be clothed in the same fashion, **“...and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”** (I Peter 5:5). That attitude will keep any from looking down their nose at others (Luke 18:10-14), but cause all to esteem others better than themselves (Philippians 2:3).

A genuine brotherly love – Every Christian knows that love is commanded, a requirement for one to be in the light (1 John 2:8-11). The depth of that love is provided by Jesus; **“A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also**

love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

When love for the brotherhood exists as it should, the following will be true:

1. The attributes of love will be displayed (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).
2. Protective measures will be evident (Romans 16:17-18).
3. Corrective measures followed (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).
4. Demonstrations of love will be practiced (1 John 3:17-18).

Two kinds of vessels

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Timothy 2:20-21). Are you a vessel of honour, prepared and meet for the Master's use?