

1 Corinthians 4.1-21

The Living Gospel pt 5 | *Are you ready to die for Christ?*
March 26, 2017 - Spence Shelton

SERVE CHARLOTTE – This weekend is our kickoff weekend to Serve Charlotte. We are pretty excited about this. Here's what that looks like: On Friday and Saturday of this week our church will scatter across the Charlotte area to serve alongside of like minded ministries that we have begun partnerships with recently. The goal is to introduce you to ministries we want you to consider investing your time & energy into as a way to give your life to serve others. Gospel Application: Christ gave his life away for us and he calls the church to give its life away for others. The church is a demonstration community and Serve Charlotte is our kickstarter campaign. But instead of collecting for ourselves we are giving away for others! Do not underestimate what a few hours with one of these awesome local ministries can do to kick start the application of the gospel in your life.

We've set this up so you can pick a time slot or two out of the four we have. Friday am/pm or Sat am/pm. Sunday we will be here for worship. In fact you may end up inviting some people to come with you. That's not the primary objective but we do hope you get to explain the gospel as you live it out. Our service today will actually end in sending us out to our Serve Charlotte rally that will be out

on the patio. If you signed up already You will get to pick up your t-shirt & connect with your team leader. AND if you haven't yet signed up, I believe you can do that today too. The vision as Scott laid out a few weeks back: What if we loved on our city so well that the Mayor of Charlotte came to us and said...Thank God Mercy Church is here.

Intro

It kind of worked out perfectly that our series we are in comes to a place today where we will take an extended look at what makes us willing to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others. Which will actually help explain the why behind things we do like Serve Charlotte. Before we get there I want to read something Jesus said that will set up our time together.

[24] Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. [26] For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? Matthew 16.24-26

SHOW THAT PASSAGE ON SCREEN WHILE I READ NEWS BELOW:

February was a deadly month for Christians living in Egypt's North Sinai, as seven Christians were martyred in about a three-week period... The first Christian killed in the

series of recent attacks, 35-year-old Wa'el Youssef, was shot to death in a market on Jan. 30. Then, on Feb. 12, masked gunmen ambushed 40-year-old Bahgat Zakher as he was driving, forcing him to stop his car before shooting him in the head. A day later, 57-year-old day laborer Adel Shawqi also was shot in the head.

On Feb. 16, Gamal Girgis, a 45-year-old schoolteacher and shop owner, was murdered. Less than a week later, on the morning of Feb. 22, the body of Saad Hakim Hanna, 65, was found in the streets of El-Arish. He had been shot in the head. The charred remains of his son, 45-year-old Medhat, were found nearby on the same morning. Kamel Yousef, a 40-year-old plumber in El-Arish, is the most recent victim of the deadly attacks on Christians. He was shot to death on Feb. 23, before militants set fire to the family's house. Kamel's wife and children escaped the attackers while they chased Kamel onto the roof of the house, where he attempted to hide.

This was last month THIS YEAR. Killed because they are professing Christians.

Today the Apostle Paul is going to challenge the Corinthian church to "imitate himself." To set aside the comfortable, people pleasing false gospel they had bought and return to the true gospel he had founded their church on. And he's going to liken himself much more to our brothers in Egypt than to us here in the U.S. And my question for you today is simple. It may sound extreme, but I promise it is ultimately what every person has to ask if they will follow Jesus:

Are you ready to die for Christ?

Jesus and Paul both said that only when you can answer YES to this question are you truly ready to follow Jesus. Here's how this chapter is going to unfold. Paul is going to show them what it means for him, as their leader, to lose his life for Christ's sake. And there are some important things for leaders to hear in that. But then, in verse 16, he's going to say

"[16] I urge you, then, be imitators of me."

Paul is saying in the way he leads the church he is **modeling** the gospel for them. See The call to lose your life for the sake of Christ has real handles in this passage and yes, it starts with church leaders. Which is very sobering for me & our elders. But Paul's point today is that the call to lose your life for Christ's sake is for ALL Christians.

Paul is going to show us what the life looks like today of the one who is ready to die for Christ. So, I'm going to show you 7 signs How you know if you are ready to die for Christ:

[1] This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. [2] Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. [3] But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.

1. You only seek God's approval (v.1-2)

- Paul says the church should regard its leaders in two ways
- **Servants:** Originally the word meant 'under-rower', denoting the lowliest servant on a ship, but by the time of the NT it simply came to mean 'servant.' The servant isn't in charge, they report to the master.
- **Stewards:** This term used of someone who a master gave responsibility to manage a large estate. The steward isn't in charge, the steward is responsible to manage what has been entrusted to him by the master.
- Kind of like this: Courtney and I try to get out together once a week to spend some time just us two. And we usually hire a babysitter to come over. Now, if I came home and our house was a total wreck...I'd ask the babysitter what happened. "Why is their artwork on the walls?!? Well the kids wanted to draw and I wanted them to be happy so I let them draw." Did they eat their dinner? "Well the kids only wanted ice cream so I gave them ice cream for dinner so they'd be happy." "Why is their spaghetti sauce all over the kitchen floor?" "Well the kids thought it'd be fun to roll around in it." "Did you clean them up?" "Well the kids didn't want to get clean so they are tucked in covered in spaghetti sauce." ... At some point I'm going to say "WHO CARES WHAT THE KIDS WANT!? YOUR JOB WAS NOT TO DECIDE WHAT THEY NEED. IT WAS TO CARE FOR THEM THE WAY I INSTRUCTED YOU!" The babysitter is a steward entrusted with the care

of the kids. The job is to carry out the parents wishes not to keep the kids happy. The Steward's job is to do his masters bidding.

- Listen one of the greatest stressors in my life, for a long time, was gaining the approval of others. But the gospel tells me I now serve an audience of one. I'm his servant, and I'm entrusted to steward the mysteries of the faith for our church. Which means...It is my responsibility not to care what you think about me. Because I have one judge to give an account to. And it aint you.
- When I preach: I have to steward what God has given me. I have to tell it to you as faithfully as I can because I work for HIM. And if you don't like it, take it up with the boss. I will not be able to please God if I live to please you. In fact it's your job & the job of the elders to make sure I remain faithful to God in that task.
- What about you? Where are you trying to please people instead of being a servant of God? If you are trying to please someone other than God, it is because you are still trying to save your life. You must LOSE your life for Christ's sake. That means...he becomes the only authority. The only influence. All other needs for approval go up on the cross with him. You die to those voices and awaken to Christ's voice alone.

- We've been talking about your person who you could invite to easter. Some of you are afraid to invite a friend to EASTER because you are afraid of what they will think about you...I don't mean this harshly but WHO CARES!? Are they going to kill you for inviting them? Likely not.

In fact, I do not even judge myself. [4] For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. [5] Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

2. You no longer compare yourself to others (v.3-4)

This one will really free you. Paul doesn't even judge himself. Not only does he rebuke others for judging him, He doesn't even judge himself. He doesn't measure himself up against Apollos, Cephas, and others. This is a huge one for those in leadership. Too many guys get caught up playing the comparison game. Church leaders are the chief of sinners in this regard. "How many people in your church?" "What is your budget?" "What kind of facility you got?" Whole time thinking it's like a checklist to see how you score against that person.

You ever compare yourself to others to see how you measure up? Or am I the only messed up one here?

- How come he got the corner office?
- How come she managed to afford that house? That car? I work hard. Come on God!
- Why did he get into that school and I didn't?
- How come his wife or her husband seems to be Captain America and I'm stuck here with Homer Simpson.

Some of you agonize over this! And you do it because you are trying to find your place in this life. Trying to matter! That's not the questions a person ready to die for Christ asks.

One Puritan mentor to a young pastor said, "I know your vanity is hurt by having such a small congregation, when many of your colleagues have such a large one. But I assure you, when you stand before God and must give an account for all those that are in your church, you will think your congregation was large enough."

You can't compare yourself to someone else because God has given each one of us talents and resources to steward in the situation he has placed us in. Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 25 about an owner who goes away from his home but leaves different amounts of money with different servants. And when he comes back, he rewards the ones who used what he gave them to increase his wealth. And he punishes the one who just sat on what he gave him. And his

point is honor God with what he's given you. Don't fix your eyes on what another has, if you do you'll miss what he's given you.

God may give you one seemingly insignificant way to serve him. Your job is not to think about what you don't have or what others have. Your job is to steward what he's given you to make much of Jesus in the situation he's put you in. Because Jesus is now the only one you care about pleasing.

God does not require you to be successful he calls you to be faithful. That's it!

[6] I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. [7] For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

I gotta tell you right here I believe is the lynchpin of the first four chapters. Paul has been trying to drive into their heads that they really haven't done anything to earn the grace God has given them. Therefore, there is no reason for pride in their lives. And it's this pride, as we talked about in chapter 1, that is the underlying cause for all of this conflict they are having. They are thinking that their special talents, special insights into the mysteries of God, etc make them spiritually superior to others. And because of this skewed

view of reality they have a warped view of themselves. They also have a warped view of others because they judge someone by their spiritual knowledge and articulation. And Paul drops this hammer to say have you been watching me? My job is not to make myself great, in fact I've intentionally led you a certain way for your benefit. I've tried to point any attention directed at me to Christ. That's all I am. And this is another sign you are ready to die for christ:

3. You are becoming a signpost to God's word (v.6)

Verses 6 and 7 show you how you are a signpost. **You confine your wisdom to the word of God.** See what he says in verse 6? Learn by Paul's example not to go beyond what is written. I can't say this enough. The more you elevate God's words and decrease your own insight...the better. This should be true in your own life. You should trust God's words more than your instincts. And you should also trust it more than your own insights into someone else's life. So when you have the opportunity to speak truth into someone's life, what should come out of you is God's word. That's what they really need.

"I feel like God is calling me to leave my wife and kids and move to NYC to chase my dreams." You could say "Well man follow your heart." OR "Don't be a bad guy. Suck it up." BOTH are wrong. If he's a Christian, what he needs to hear is "The gospel says you are greatly loved. And that love was sacrificial. And Ephesians 5 says God calls you to love your wife LIKE Christ loved the church. It was a Joy for him to lay

down his life for you. So man this sounds like a hard season to love your wife. I promise you aren't easy for Christ to love. Lean into that love and accept the responsibility he's given you. There is great joy there." If you are losing your life for Christ's sake, you should be losing your words for his words. Your wisdom for his wisdom.

4. You are becoming a signpost to God's power (v.7)

The problem the Corinthians had is that they were constantly taking credit that was reserved for God alone. Look at [verse 7 again](#). Certain leaders were boasting in their ability to preach. As if the ability to even breathe was anything other than God's gift to them. Why would you act like you *earned* ANYTHING you have? Instead of puffing out their chests proud of themselves, they should point to the one they received these gifts from. And Paul is trying to show them how toxic that pride is to their soul & to the church. And that the power of God can't work in that.

There is a great little book by Tim Keller called the Freedom of Self Forgetfulness. I mentioned something from it last week. Keller looks at verses 6 & 7 for the whole book and says

"spiritual pride is the illusion that we are competent to run our own lives, achieve our own sense of self-worth and find a purpose big enough to give us meaning in life without God." And then like all good Christian teachers he quotes ole C.S. Lewis from Mere Christianity who said

"Pride gets no pleasure of having something, only out of

having more of it than the next person."

Get that? It's a thinker so let me repeat...

The human ego is a black hole that can never be filled. It can never be satisfied. In the Corinthian church people are in effect fighting over who has a close relationship with Paul and other leaders. They aren't content in just knowing Paul. They have to use it as one-upmanship over others in the church. We call it "name dropping." The soul can never be satisfied having to constantly validate yourself like that!

But Paul says through the gospel he's free because he's not consumed by thinking about where he stands in some social Darwin pecking order. Self-concern will consume you and it's exhausting right? But Paul, now with his standing secure in Christ. He's able to think about himself less. ****Not think less of himself, but think of himself less.** Because of how much God thinks about Paul, Because of the great worth and value God gives him, he doesn't have to think about himself.

He's just the recipient of what God has done in his life. Now he's just a servant rowing below deck for his captain. Just a steward! Just pointing people to the one who has given him everything! We are going to come back to how we get here from where we are in just a few minutes. Lets keep going in the passage

[8] Already you have all you want! Already you have

become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!

Ok this is sarcasm. And when Paul uses sarcasm, it isn't good. Basically he's saying you've created this false reality where you think God is best represented by people of power, influence and prestige. But that isn't the world we are in right now.

And to prove it he says look at how your leaders live in comparison to you. You keep trying to advance your life, but your leaders seek to lose their lives.

[9] For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. [10] We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. [11] To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, [12] and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; [13] when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

Paul uses a bunch of contrasting images here. Spectacle – most likely refers to the prisoners that were thrown into the ring to be slaughtered by lions. And he's saying we are in the ring, you are in the stands watching. We are fools according to this world. But whatever Christianity you are

peddling keeps you in honor in the eyes of those in Corinth, but we are in disrepute. In fact, verse 13 – we have become scum of the world...we are everyone's garbage.

5. You crucified the American dream(v.8-13)

Paul wasn't celebrating that the world mocked at Christ, but he acknowledged the wisdom of God was foolishness to the world! And he clung to it without compromise. Even when it cost him everything in this life. Are you prepared to suffer for Christ? Most of us think that suffering is against our constitutional rights.

And I have to plead with you to throw away your consuming desire for comfort and embrace suffering for the gospel! The awakening we are praying for here is not going to come comfortably! It's going to cost a lot. Do you think the enemy is just going to lay down and let all of Charlotte find Christ? NO. It's going to be a battle that will cost time, money, energy, reputations, sweat, relationships and who knows what else. Are you ready to THROW AWAY THE AMERICAN DREAM! Your American dream was crucified on the cross of Christ!

Think about it. For a second right here. In light of eternity and what is at stake...what are the things that we care a WHOLE LOT about that are really just distractions and trivialities? I know people crazy committed...to kickball. Crazy committed to their handicap on the golf course. Crazy committed to WATCHING football. Crazy committed to

instagram. People say the rising generation is commitment averse. That's crazy. We make commitments to the things that matter to us. What will it look like to suffer for Christ here in our city? I don't know. I know it will involve sacrificing yourself, on some level, for others.

It will be choosing to tutor refugee kids instead of spending the weekend at the lake. It will be giving money so a church planter can go to the middle east instead of buying a better cable package. It will be prioritizing a ministry team commitment over a tailgating commitment. And maybe it will be surrendering your Retirement Magic Number, your dream of comfortable boring retirement, so that you can go preach the gospel among unreached people groups. Christians...take your version of the American dream, of American entitlement to comfortable living, to have a nice house & a nice car and a nice retirement..take all that and nail it to the cross.

The enemy is lulling an entire generation of American Christians into a stupor with video games, country club memberships, retirement numbers. While billions around the world die apart from Christ. Don't chase the american dream. It will not fulfill you. It will only distract you. Chase Christ.

[14] I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. [15] For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through

the gospel. [16] I urge you, then, be imitators of me. [17] That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

6. You help others follow Christ (vv 14-17)

This one is pretty simple but crucial. Are you investing into people in such a way that they seek to model their walk with Christ after yours? Paul said that's what he did with Timothy and that's now what Timothy was to do for them. Your life can only be about so many things and you can only have so many relationships. Christ calls you to give away your life. How could you do that in a way that helps others follow Christ?

I have a friend named Carl. Retired now. But Carl worked for IBM. And a tarheel alum. He is a legend both at IBM and in his church. That's because "Carl knows everybody." Here's why: Carl was intentional to always look for ways to care for others. Get this: he reads the Daily Tarheel (campus newspaper) still and when a student writes an interesting story, Christian or not, he emails them. Invites them to lunch, and hears their story. Around IBM he got to know others & their stories. Around RDU, lunch with Carl is a right of passage. You knew you'd get a good meal, good stories, and a convo about Jesus. Carl is retired now. Which just means he gives more time to meeting people and being a bridge between where they are and who Christ is. He is 5' nothing, 70 years old, and has shared Jesus with more people than I even know. That's Carl. He isn't obnoxious

about his faith. He isn't standing outside a movie theater holding a sign telling you to avoid the eternal flames. He's so UNabrasive, kind, and generous that when he talks to you about Jesus you can't help but engage the conversation.

Some of you need to get off the sidelines and start helping others follow Christ. You've got friends you've known for years and you've never even broached the gospel with them. What is more important? If you are worried it will change where you stand with them, humbly can I say: That is selfish. I fall victim to this too ok. But listen Because where you stand with someone shouldn't be as important to you as where they stand with Christ.

[18] Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. [19] But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. [20] For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.

7. You talk less and obey more. (v.18-20)

I told you he'd come back around to this "power" idea. The Corinthians loved to talk a good game. And Paul calls them out saying we'll test the true depth of their faith not in what they SAY, but in their power. When someone has died to self and fully surrendered to Christ, and their lives are about advancing Christ's name and not their own, that is a person that God will work through. And the evidence of the gospel will be all over them. Does this mean they will perform great miracles like healings and casting out

demons? Not necessarily. It means their life is transformed into the image of Christ. They love the marginalized in society, sacrifice for others, and give generously to those in need. It means they hate sin and love the things that God loves and they obey the commands of God as he's laid them out in the scriptures. Many of us need to stop making excuses. We need to shut our mouths and obey Christ. THAT is one who knows he is a servant. That she is a steward of the gospel. The servant doesn't ramble on about the master's commands...the good servant OBEYS the master. And when we obey that's where the power of God is unleashed. Maybe you wonder why God doesn't seem to be at work in your life and my question is are you obeying him? Or just talking a good game? We are in the south. This is the Major Leagues of playing the church game. But if you want to really see God move in your life: OBEY! Radically obey him. It will be foolishness to the world to do so, and when you lose your life that way, you'll finally find it.

Closing

How do we get to a place where we can lose ourselves for Christ? In that book I mentioned by Keller, he talks about how counter-intuitive it is for us to forget ourselves for Christ's sake. But Paul shows us how we get there.¹

- Remember where Paul said I don't care what you say about me? Paul is acknowledging that deep in our soul is a desire to matter. He even uses a

¹ Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness* (____) 38-39.

courtroom analogy. And says he doesn't need a verdict from them on if they approve of him. And with that he taps into something we all deal with. Our need to matter, we can call that our identity or our self-esteem. And he's saying the problem with self-esteem is that EVERY SINGLE DAY it is on trial. The courtroom has a prosecution and a defense and everything we do provides evidence of for one or the other. Some days we feel like we are winning and other days like we are losing.

- But for Paul, the trial is over! The ultimate verdict is in. He knows others cannot judge him and even he cannot justify himself. The only opinion that matters is the LORD's. The Lord is the only true judge.
- And listen: only in the gospel do you get the verdict before the action. The Gospel says that before the prosecution & defense read out the right and wrong of your life The Judge slams the hammer down and gives you your sentence.
- You are guilty. You've tried to build your own kingdom. You've slighted others to improve yourself. You've served others in order to serve yourself. And just one sin has made you guilty. But the Gospel says God looks down at you with love. And says justice would be you dying as a payment for your sin. But instead I'm going to send my son. And he will die in your place. And that changes your verdict. Your sin has been paid for. You are free.
- When we truly understand that, we don't obey to earn our freedom. We obey because we have been

set free!

- Is that you?