Exploring and Proclaiming the Depths of Scripture
FOCAL POINT MINISTRIES

Urgently Devoted – Part 5
Considering the Sacrifice of Service
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Well, there was a man named William James Clarke, who was known by everyone in his town as being a very helpful man. Always ready whenever there was a problem, a crisis, a disaster in his community he was the first to show up and was always there with his quiet confidence and his go-to attitude ready to help. He would always come wearing his Green Beret Special Forces uniform. That's the kind of guy he was. Matter of fact, he carried that quiet confidence with all those badges and insignias proudly pinned to his chest, telling people exactly what they should do in any crisis. Matter of fact, there was a time when a bridge collapsed, famously on I-40, near where he lived, and when he got there it was the biggest disaster he'd ever shown up to. And he started telling people including the first responders where they should go, what they should do, who they should attend to first. And even when the NTSB showed up he started directing the federal agents where they should be. The FBI showed up as part of the investigation and he started trying to tell them where they should go.

The problem with Captain William was that he was a fraud. He was wearing a uniform with all the badges and stripes and insignias but none of them were government-issued. I like the way Military.com on the website tells the story and how it began to unravel. It says there was a real Army sergeant who noticed, quote, something fishy about the obese Green Beret. I just like that part of it. Of course, other things started to come to the fore that proved that this didn't just add up. And as it came to the truth Clarke had never been to boot camp. He'd never been in the service. He'd never trained in special forces. He'd never endured the pain. He'd never gone through the deprivation, the exhaustion, the discipline, or any of the pressure that's required to wear all those badges and stripes and insignia. He was a fraud. Because anyone can wear a uniform, but very few can endure what it costs to represent that uniform. The true valor and the true honor that's required can't be faked.

That is in essence what the Apostle Paul is trying to show in Second Corinthians Chapter 11 when it comes to spiritual leadership. It may not be obvious on the surface but that is precisely what he's doing in these last verses in Second Corinthians Chapter 11 verses 22 through 33. Here is a set of leaders who have come to Corinth and have said to the Corinthian Christians, hey, listen to us, follow us. They were quickly pointing to their badges and their insignias and pointing to their stripes saying you should follow us, you should believe us, you should listen to us. And the Apostle Paul is going to expose them as frauds. And he's going to say here's what's missing. There's something key that is missing. And that's what he leans into here at the end. And he does it very reluctantly because he's going to point to where what is missing in their lives is present in his life. And they forced him to do this and so he says this is crazy that I have to do it, but I'm going to show you that this is what is really the mark of a true servant and leader in the church. Just as military training breaks down people in order to raise up effective soldiers, Paul is going to tell in this very famous passage about his painful training.

So let's look at this text together. I'll read it from the English Standard Version, verses 22 through 33 in Second Corinthians Chapter 11. And we'll see here as he moves in verse 22 from some immutable characteristics, being a Hebrew and Israelite, a child offspring of Abraham, he'll move to the real issue in verse 23. So he asks, "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I." But then he says, "Are they servants of Christ?" Right? They've come into town saying, that's what we are, not just servants of Christ, we're apostles, right? Which of course we're sent here but we're serving Christ in our leadership here. He says, "I am a better one." That is really what he's trying to show. He's the real McCoy. He's the real one. And he said, but "I'm talking like a madman," right? You forced me to this. I'm doing this and I'm having to boast, quote-unquote, in who I am. But I'm really just showing you the difference between real leadership and their fake leadership, their worldly leadership.

And then he goes to talk about something that they would never talk about because it's completely different. It's a completely different value set than their leadership would ever want to magnify. They would never put this down on their resume. But he's going to do something that's going to redefine everything. He says here's why I'm a better servant of Christ. I have "far greater labors, far more imprisonments with countless beatings and often near death. Five times," verse 24 says, "I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from the other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I'm not weak? Who's made to fall, and I'm not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast in the things that show my weakness."

Now that one verse has been misunderstood by a lot of people, and I want you to know what he's not saying. All of these things are showing what his leadership has cost him, something that the false leaders who are surreptitiously trying to draw these Corinthians away from, if you look back up to verses 2 and 3, this pure devotion to Christ. They're drawing them away by propping themselves up, saying listen to us, listen to us. We're the kind of leaders that you should listen to. They're the kinds of people who would never do this kind of thing because their definition of leadership is completely different. And so he's showing his quote unquote weakness and boasting in the weakness, not because he has no authority, not because he's not a real apostle, not because he's not going to say to his understudies like Titus, as we quoted last time we were together, hey, teach all these things "with all authority. Let no one disregard you." It reminds me of what I often quote from this platform when C.S. Lewis talks about humility. Humility is not the beautiful woman thinking she's ugly or the intelligent man thinking he's stupid. No, that's not humility. That's not what we're talking about, and we're not talking about here the fact that he is someone who's trying to say well, I'm just weak, you shouldn't listen to me. Right? He's the one who wrote to the Romans don't think more highly of yourself than you ought but think so as to have sound judgment. Think rightly about yourself.

So he is thinking rightly about himself and he's comparing himself with phony leaders who are wearing a lot of insignias and badges on their chests. But it's all fake. They're not the leaders who have any authority in the church. He is a leader who has authority in the church, but he's talking about weakness. And remember how the book started? I know I have a few more verses to read here but remember how the book started. In Second Corinthians Chapter 1, he says I "don't want you to be unaware, brothers of," the suffering, the pain, "the affliction we experienced in Asia." Do you remember that? He says, "We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself." But then he goes on to explain why so that we wouldn't "rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." The point is, I've been through all of this. God has taken me to the brink of my own strength so that I could rely on where it needs to be. I can rely on God. And guess what that makes him now? A very, very useful leader in the church.

So it's not that he's not a leader. It's not that he's not a strong leader, but his strength of leadership comes from all that God has put him through to where he knows where he is supposed to rely. He knows whom he's supposed to trust. He knows that he's supposed to pray. He knows who he's relying on and seeking and the wisdom he's supposed to gather. It comes from God, not himself. And it doesn't mean that he's not strong. It doesn't mean that he doesn't endure. It doesn't mean he doesn't persevere. It doesn't mean that he's not digging deep to be patient. Right? All these things are true. It doesn't mean he doesn't work hard for wisdom. It just means that all the training, just like the training in the military service breaks you down. That it just can raise you up to be something strong because you've been through all of that. And the Apostle Paul is saying these things that I have been through, these are the things that make me useful. When he says to Timothy I want you to be a vessel for honor, but you have to go through a lot. You have to take certain things out. You have to go through the kinds of things that I've taught you. And it's so different than the world. It's a whole redefinition, and I think the way it ends is where I want to start.

So let me read those things now and we can turn this outline on its head just a little bit. "If I must boast," verse 30, "I'll boast in the things that show my weakness." They would never do that. They would never talk about hardship and toil and sleepless nights and dangers and all that they've been through, stoning and beaten with rods. They would never do it. But I'm going to talk about those things. "The God and Father of the Lord Jesus," verse 31, "he who is blessed forever, knows that I'm not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretus was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in a wall and escaped his hands." Now that goes back to Acts Chapter 9. That's the chapter of Paul's conversion. Paul, remember, is on the way to Damascus from Jerusalem. He's an up-and-coming Pharisee, and he's going to, hopefully in his own mind as he sat at the feet of Gamaliel learning all the things that Pharisees should learn, hopefully he's going to sit on the Sanhedrin one day as one of the Supreme Court leaders of Israel. And he's trying to stamp out this Way, as it's called, this sect of Judaism, he is going to stamp it out. He wants to kill these Christians. He gets knocked off his horse. Jesus says to him, "Why are you persecuting me?" And you remember what happens. God blinds him. He blinds him and he has him led by the hand. Now the big, strong, scary Saul of Tarsus now is led by the hand to

the house of a man named Ananias, not the Ananias of Acts Chapter 5, but the Ananias who lives in Damascus, who's now going to lead Saul of Tarsus to Christ and to penitent faith in Christ.

And as we learned as we studied the book of Acts, sometimes Luke compresses time, you know, really tightly into certain passages and Acts Chapter 9 is one of them when he uses the phrase and after "many days." What we learn after many days in Acts Chapter 9 is defined in Galatians Chapter 1, when he talks about it being three years. Because he goes into what's called the Arabian desert, and in the Arabian desert, which if you look at a map, you think it's way down south but really the Arabian desert if you look at a map that shows topography and shows, you know, kind of the desert regions of the Near East, it creeps all the way up in the middle. That's why people traveled up and over if they were going to go from, you know, Mesopotamia over to the Mediterranean, you know, area, the place where Israel is on the coast, they would go up and over. You would never go straight through because that desert area there, the northern Arabian desert, was southeast of Damascus. That's where he went. And he spent time in that desert. And as it says in Galatians Chapter 1, he didn't go down to Jerusalem and sit at the feet of the apostles, but he went and received this New Testament truth not from any man he says he received it by a direct revelation of Christ.

So he's spending time now in the desert learning Christology, even though he'd been to seminary as a Jew, Christ is saying, slow down, slow down. First he slows him down by blindness. He leads him to Christ. Now his eyes are open. Why not get out there and just start your ministry? No, no, no, no, slow down. You're going to learn Christianity. Three years he's going to spend. Now he's going in and out at Damascus. Now he's teaching in the synagogues and the Jews are hating him. They're persecuting him so badly after three years. As he leaves and now is finally going to go to Jerusalem, he has to be let down in a basket. Think about how humiliating. It's like Annie trying to escape the orphanage in a laundry basket. Right? Anybody? You're surprised I know that, right? But there she goes. Right? It's just so humiliating. And I want to start here because that is the picture. He's showing things that seem so humiliating. Because in a world that's wired completely different than the kingdom of God, this is the basic principle of Scripture, right? If you want to be great in the kingdom, if you want to be exalted, to quote as Peter put it, if you want to be exalted by God, well, then you need to humble yourself, which even as a word, linguistically, it's a lowering word. It means to arrange yourself under, right? Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you at the proper time.

These are words that analogize a direction. Right? You go down in the Christian life if you'd like to go up. And here he's being let down in a basket. He's just explained all the things that come with that. And he just says listen, this is how real leadership works in the church. These guys have a completely different value system. Real leadership, this is what it looks like. And you guys should be listening to the real apostles, not the fake apostles, the super-apostles who are always exalting themselves. Number one on your outline, just to look at these four last verses, let's encapsulate them this way. You need to, number one, "Rethink Your Definition of Greatness." Rethink your definition of greatness. Now, I know you've heard that but let's just kind of systematically step back and just think about some basic things. One of

them that may be novel to some of you. Number one, as a sub-point, let's just put it this way, "Greatness In the Bible Is a Real Thing." There is a sense of greatness. I know some people think the Bible is into some kind of character communism, but there is no character communism in the Bible. There is greatness. There's a gradation of greatness in the Bible.

And God would like you, let's put it this way, to make it even more uncomfortable, God would like you to be greater than you are. He'd like you to be great. He's all about greatness and he'd like you to be great. He'd like, just like a lot of things in the Bible, he'd like you to be great by biblical standards. And the problem with us is God's instructing us in the New Testament is we have to be great by biblical standards. We have to be rich by biblical standards. We have to have all the definitions of what we should want in terms of happiness or pleasure or joy or wealth or power or greatness, it should all be defined biblically. And so in the Bible we should aspire for greatness. As I often quote when Moody has his grandchild born, D.L. Moody, Dwight Moody, he sends the telegram to his daughter and he says may she be great in the kingdom of heaven. Right? That's just a great... That's it. Greatness. We want greatness for our grandkids. We want greatness for our kids. And God wants greatness for you. Greatness is a thing and God is all about that, but it's defined very differently.

Turn with me real quickly to Philippians Chapter 2. Philippians Chapter 2. This is a classic text, I know you know the text if you've been around the block a few times in the Christian life, but let's look at this text together. I just want to start with the last three verses of this section, verses 9, 10 and 11, verses 9, 10 and 11. Philippians 2:9. Let's read these last three verses here of this section. "God has highly exalted him," that's Jesus in this context, "and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." Now, I know he's unique in that this is the God-Man, the second person of the Triune God. And of course, he's going to be exalted in a way that the rest of the human race is not going to be exalted, "so that the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Now here's what I know about this context. It's a paradigm for people. And when I start with verse 9 and don't read the first word we need to inject it now because this is the punchline to what comes before it. And it starts with the word "therefore." And don't let me miss the word "therefore" because it is the punchline to everything that precedes it. He's exalting Jesus in this paradigm for a reason that I'm supposed to catch and learn so that I can... If I want greatness in the economy of Christ I need to learn from this paradigm. This is the equation.

So I would like God to exalt me just to go back to what was written by the breath of God through Peter. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. He will exalt you at the proper time. Okay, great. I want to be exalted. That would be good. That's a good, godly desire. Be great in the kingdom of God. So how do I do it? Well, let's go way back up to where it starts in talking to the people, the Christians in Philippi, Philippians Chapter 3 verse 3, "do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit." Now, if I'm asking a non-Christian or a super-apostle, how do you go up in the world's economy? Those words work perfectly, selfish ambition and conceit. You're number one, you're worth it. L'Oreal or whatever, right? I don't know, two phrases, you only go around once in life. Grab all the gusto you can. I don't know which beer company that was? I don't remember. There are plenty of slogans and philosophies of the

world that are all about that. It's you. Go get it. You're worth it. You're number one. It's about you. Selfish ambition and conceit, right? You're great. It's all about that. That is the world's value. But the value Paul's trying to teach the Philippians is, no, that's not it. But here's the word that has a directional linguistic definition, "humble" yourself. Put yourself under. "In humility," that's the word humility, "count others as more significant than yourselves," right? In humility count others more significant than yourselves.

So I'm supposed to have in my mind others above me. And what does that mean? Well, their agenda, their stuff, their needs. Verse 4, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also the interests of others." So I'm putting their interests above my own interests. That's the command. And then he says let me give you the equation, the paradigm. Verse 5, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." The paradigm is yours. You've learned about Christ. There it is. And from our perspective we can read it in the gospels. We see it in the quadraphonic biographies of Christ, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant," a slave, "being born in the likeness of men." Being found in the human form. He humbled himself by becoming obedient even to the point of death, mind-boggling, even death on a cross. So he is not going to be decapitated. He's not going to have the lethal injection. He's not going to be, you know, hanged like by a hangman. He's going to suffer and be tortured, naked and humiliated on a cross. That he did even though he is better than the people he's doing it for. But he counts them and their needs and interests above his own.

That is the value of God. And when he sees that then therefore he highly exalts the servant. So, greatness is a real thing with God and he wants greatness for his people. How do you get it? Well, the value is you have to have people not being conceited or putting themselves first. What he values are service and humility, seeing other people as more important. That's the value. Now, even embedded in this passage, what comes associated with that necessarily, what's inextricably bound with service? Well, here, clearly, if you're going to redeem mankind, pain, pain, sacrifice, deprivation, pressure, work. It is going to be hard. Let me drive this home just so it's not theoretical. Matthew Chapter 20. Matthew Chapter 20. Before we leave this first point. Matthew Chapter 20. Drop down to verse 20. Matthew 20:20, "Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee," James and John, "came to him," that's Jesus, "with her sons," with all their hair gelled up, "kneeling before Jesus she asked him for something. And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.'" Now you keep talking about your kingdom coming and your kingdom and your glory, sitting on your throne, separating the nations. You're going to be this bigwig. You're the Messiah. I get all that. Can you just let my two sons, and I'll just leave it up to you which one, but put one at your right hand, the number one slot, and put one at your left hand, the number two slot. I want them to be great in your kingdom, just like D.L. Moody. I want my sons to be great in your kingdom. Okay.

"Jesus answered," verse 22, "'You do not know what you're asking.'" Now, she does know what she's asking for. She does. What he is saying is you don't know the associated cost of what you're asking for. Because he goes on to the associated cost. You have to be able to buy the value and the value comes with an inextricably bound cost. "Are you able to drink the

cup that I'm to drink?" Jesus comes to serve. You can drop down to the very bottom of this passage, verse 28, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." What did that cost? It cost him what we just read in Philippians Chapter 2 verse 8, "even death on a cross," on a torture rack, on something where he's going to hang there naked and suffocate and bleed to death. That's horrible. So he says I have to drink this nasty-tasting chalice of the wrath of God with the dregs in it. I have to drink that. I'm going to pray in the garden. Oh, please let this cup pass from me. But I'm going to have to drink this. Do you know what you're asking for your kids? The kids that you love so much that you gelled their hair up just now? Do you know what you're asking for? You want them to be great, but greatness comes with service, and service costs pain. Do you want them to drink the nasty cup of pain? Do you want that? Do you know what you're asking? You don't know what you're asking for. You know what you're asking for. But you don't know what comes with what you're asking for.

"They said to him, 'We're able.'" They chimed in at that point, yeah, well, we can do it. Verse 23, "He said to them, 'You will drink my cup.'" I don't know what extent, "but to sit at my right hand and my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it's been prepared by my Father." So God has a plan. We'll figure out who's going to be at the top of that list. It's not that he says no. No one's going to sit at my right and my left. There's not going to be a pecking order. There's going to be a pecking order. Verse 24, But "when the ten heard it, they were indignant," not because they were interrupting Christ's dinner, but because they wanted those spots. "But Jesus called them and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them,'" which means basically this: selfish ambition and conceit. And they want to avoid pain. They want to avoid suffering. They want to avoid anything that's going to inconvenience them. They want everyone serving them. I know that because the next verse, "It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your 'Diagnosis,'" your servant, "and whoever would be first among you must be your 'Doulos,'" your slave, "even as the Son of Man." That's a big word in the book of Daniel. The one who's going to rule the world, "came not to be served," at least not in his first advent, "but to serve, and to give his life as," a payment, "a ransom for many."

So the picture here is this. You want to be great? Not a bad thing to want. It's not a bad thing to be, but it's going to cost. Everybody we read about, the biographies in our bookstore, the people who we say that's the person who is great in the kingdom. Just know this, there are always associated pains. Why? Because we think they're great, and they are great because they're servants. Paul's listing all the things associated with his service. All the pain. Beaten, whipped, stoned. All these things that he had happened to him. All of this was because he was a servant. Because go back in your mind to verses 2 and 3, because he was devoted to Christ, and because he was devoted to Christ, he was devoted to his cause and devoted to his cause meant you were going to serve. And if you're going to serve, you're going to suffer. Take a young teenage girl who was born about 130 years ago in Northern Ireland, and she was convicted under the preaching of the Word as a teenager and she gave her life to Christ with great relief. She knew she was a sinner. She was enamored with the fact that Christ would die for her and she said, I just want to serve Christ.

So she went out to the young girls who were serving, really conscripted into the mills in Belfast, Ireland. And she said we have to reach these gals with the gospel. They're hurting, they're struggling, they're open to the gospel. So she goes and she ministers to them. She's just filled with gratification in serving the Lord and seeing people respond. And so she says I want to give my life to this. So I want to do this full-time. Where can I do that? So she says I want to be a missionary. So she signs up to go be a missionary to China. And they say I don't think you're up for this. Why? Well, because she had a chronic illness and it caused her a lot of pain and she couldn't keep up with everyone else. So they said, no, I don't think you can do that. Well, she said I really want to do that. Well, sorry, you're not going to work with us. She kept trying. She kept applying. She finally found a mission agency that would take her and it was to India. And so off she went to India. She went to India and it was hard, actually harder in many ways than it was going to China. And she went to India and it was really dirty-aired polluted cities. And she went there and served for 55 years under some really difficult circumstances with her chronic illness and went there and served and served and served. And she dealt mostly with these young girls who were conscripted into the Hindu temples and were abused sexually by the people who were there. And she went there looking just like she did in Belfast, seeing the people that needed Christ who were open to the gospel. She did incredible work trying to see these people reached with the gospel of Christ and doing good just in terms of human flourishing for people in that country.

And then her illness, her health completely collapsed. And what she did was not run to Northern Ireland to go home. But she set up a place where she could just be bedridden, which sounds terrible. But she spent 20 years, her last 20 years of life, after 34 years of ministry, she spent 20 years in bed. And she didn't stop doing ministry. She prayed. She interceded. She brought people to her bedside and discipled them. She sat there with her Bible and she wrote on her tablet. She wrote songs. She wrote hymns, she wrote poems, she wrote books. And she kept ministering until her very last breath. And you know what? Most people see her as a great person. Her name is Amy Carmichael, by the way. Maybe you've heard of her. There are biographies of her in our bookstore. She's great in the kingdom of God. She gave up on the Northern Ireland dream, the California dream, the American dream, the Orange County lifestyle. She never married, never had kids, never had the picket fence. She never had the, you know, the 2.5 kids. She was just someone who said, I love Christ and I want to serve him. And they write books about her. Why? Because she's great in the kingdom of heaven. What's her life about? A lot of suffering, a lot of pain. And yet sometimes in our Christian life we struggle to even earn the title diagnosis, let alone doulos. Am I really a servant of Christ?

Let's go back to verse 22 of our passage, Second Corinthians Chapter 11 verse 22. I think we should start here. "Are they Hebrews?" Well, these are immutable facts as it comes to what they were flashing. You can't do anything about that. I'm not signing up to be an apostle but I am devoted to Christ. I am devoted to Christ so I want to be a servant. Verse 23, "Are they servants of Christ?" Well, he says, "I'm a better one -- I'm talking like a madman." I'm not, you know, wanting to compare myself to people. I often talk about lateral comparisons. Let's not make lateral comparisons. But there is a time for making comparisons. And you should understand that in Scripture Jesus asks us to think in these terms occasionally. Matter of fact,

it's more than occasionally. Sometimes I say listen, no lateral comparisons when we get competitive, envious, jealous of people, no, stop. But there are times when Jesus says some basic things that I think will sound natural and normal to you as a Christian. He says stuff like this: "a healthy tree bears good fruit, but a diseased tree bears bad fruit." You'd better make sure which one you are. Right? That's a comparison. You should know that. I mean, you should be able to know if you're a good tree or a bad tree. Hey, a good man with a good heart out of the good treasure within him "brings forth good things." A bad man with a bad heart, bad "treasure brings forth evil things." "For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." You ought to be able to compare and know which one you are.

Matter of fact, he's going to say, the Apostle Paul in Second Corinthians Chapter 13, he's going to say, here's how the book's going to end, at least one of the words in the last chapter is "test yourselves" to see if you're of the faith. Test yourselves. You need to know. And to do that you're going to look at some of the basic comparisons. Paul's going to say these guys are false apostles. How do you know that? Because he knows he's a true apostle. And one of the reasons he knows is I'm committed humbly to serve you guys. He's saying that to the Corinthians. These guys, they're into themselves. Selfish ambition and conceit. He can make that comparison. Number two on your outline, you need to "Examine Yourself as a Servant of Christ." Now, I didn't embed the word "compare," but real servants of Christ are open to the kind of biblical comparison that sometimes we need to make. Am I a good tree bearing good fruit? Let's just start with the gospel. Do I have the right gospel? Am I bearing biblical fruit? But I want to take it into where Paul is getting into. And that is, I want to make sure that my regenerate heart loves God and if I love God, which starts in verse 2, I have a devotion to God, am I devoted enough to God to be devoted to his cause?

Now I understand there are two different points of view in our passage. We can identify with the Corinthians, whom Paul's concerned are being surreptitiously drawn away from a pure and sincere devotion to Christ. And then Paul's comparing himself with the false teachers and he's saying I'm a real servant of Christ. I want us to think of both. I'm kind of leaning into the latter in this sermon if you're following the logic here. I mean, clearly, I want us to think in the latter but it starts with the former, and that is this: are you a Christian and are you devoted to Christ? If you're devoted to Christ, and Satan is not pulling you away from that sincere devotion to Christ, I am saying if you are devoted to Christ, how devoted are you to his cause? And if you are devoted to his cause, he laid down his life for you, you're going to lay down your life for the brothers. Or, as Paul put it, you're going to "endure all things for the sake of the elect." You're going to care about lost people and you're going to care about people who are saved, wanting them to observe all the Christ commanded. You're going to start to care and sacrifice and put other people's interests before your own. And that's always going to cost.

Are you a servant of Christ? See, that's what we need to look for. It's like a woman being married to a man who started his own business. It's growing. He eats and sleeps and drinks nothing but his business. And you say I don't care about the business, but I love the guy. No, you can't love the man and not care about the business. This is what he cares about. Jesus says I "will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And he's telling

you to snatch people from the fire. You're going to snatch people from the fire. Come and "follow me, and I'll make you fishers of men." He enlists us ALL to care about his passion. So if you're devoted to Christ, you have to be devoted to his cause. That's why you're a servant of Christ. You're not just the bride of Christ. You're the servant of Christ. Christ has a cause. And the cause is to see people saved and see people built up in Christ.

And by the way, you may say yeah, I know I'm a Christian. I'm a real Christian. Well, maybe you need to jot this one down. Revelation Chapter 2 verses 3 through 5. It may be that you need to look at how Satan may have been pulling you away from what you initially had when you first loved Christ. Here he's talking to the church of Ephesus, and he says you have a lot of stuff in place. You're patiently enduring and you're bearing up for my sake. Yeah, I get that. You're still coming to church. You're doing your thing, but you've "abandoned the love you had at first." And then here's how we test that. "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first." Here's the problem with some of us, right? We don't have the kind of adherence to the things we did in our early Christian life that were all about the cause of Christ. I mean, you shared your faith, you discipled people, you sat down and you did the things you know Christ cared about. And now it's just like reading theology. Now it's a more cerebral, esoteric Christianity. "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first." Now I know that's a corporate command and it's to the church, but the church is made up of individuals. And he does come and say, hey, if you guys don't fix this, I'm going to shut the church down. He hails them for knowing false doctrine. He hails them for being patient and enduring and all of that. But they don't have the same zeal for the works that were so obvious in the early days of the Christian life.

Do you remember Luke Chapter 9 verses 57 through 62? I quote these passages often. They're going along the road and someone said to him, I'll follow you wherever you go. Okay. Here's the thing about following Christ. He's going to enlist you in his cause. Jesus said here's the problem, you don't know the associated costs. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Are you really ready to be a servant of Christ? Because it may cost you the comforts that you now enjoy. Another one says, hey, I'll follow you. But "let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead." Some people said, well, I'd like to do your stuff, but, you know, my family comes first. Yet another one says, "I'll follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow." Just know that if you love God you're going to love his work. You're going to love his cause. "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Here's the thing about some people, speaking of the connection to Revelation Chapter 2 verses 3 through 5, some of us put our hand to the plow and we look forward at the beginning of our Christian life, but we're looking back a lot later in our Christian life. We have to evaluate where you are as a servant of Christ. Are you urgently devoted? That's the title of our series. If you are in need to be urgently devoted, listening to the right leaders as this whole series was about. But like the Apostle Paul be willing to be committed to the cause so much so that it's something you're willing to pay the costs, whatever it might cost you.

Well, let's get specific. In the middle of verse 23 he starts to list things. And the first list, verses 23 through 29, it can really be broken down into four sections. But let's give it a title here because all of these are sacrificial, labors, imprisonments, beatings. Right? I nearly died, I was whipped, I was beaten, I was stoned to death almost, shipwrecked. Let's call it this. You need to consider the sacrifices of your devotion. Number three, "Consider the Sacrifices of Your Devotion." If you're devoted to Christ and his cause, what are the sacrifices? Let's just look specifically at what you're sacrificing for your love and devotion to Christ and his cause. Because you can't say you love Christ and don't have a devotion and commitment to his cause. Okay. Let's just look at four things that we can categorize. Labors, imprisonments, beatings, being whipped, beaten with rods, rocks thrown at you, shipwrecked and adrift on the sea. Those are Paul's specifics. But what are those? Well, those are all things that are going to cause you physical pain, right? Physical pain. So Letter 'A,' let's just give a spectrum so we can identify with it. Let's call it discomforts to physical pain, Letter 'A' "Discomforts to Physical Pain." Have you as a servant of Christ been able to see things that have been uncomfortable because you're serving Christ all the way to physical pain?

Now, you may not be living in the first century as a high-profile apostle and have people throwing rocks at you or hitching you to a post and whipping your back. Okay. But I'm really grateful and I often quote this one, Luke Chapter 6 verse 22, Jesus gives us some words that aren't about physical pain but they're still painful. He says this in Luke Chapter 6 verse 22 that certainly are in this category and on the spectrum of pain. He says, "when people hate you and when they exclude you and when they revile you and when they spurn your name as evil." There are no sticks and stones that break your bones in that list. Hate you, exclude you, revile you, and "spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!" Those things I just want to ask you, do they hurt? The answer? Yes, they hurt. Someone at work because you stand up for Christ, you align yourself with Christianity. Someone at school, someone in your neighborhood. Does it hurt? Yes, it hurts. Now, that passage says this. If you get hated, excluded, reviled, or spurned because of your Christianity, here's what it says in the next verse. "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy." Now that's a weird thing to say the day you come home from work and say I was excluded from the executive committee on the board because, you know, I'm a Christian and I don't laugh at their dirty jokes. And your wife says well, did you leap? Did you jump? Because that's what the Bible says. You should be jumping for joy. It's just a hard thing to kind of reflexively do when you're excluded or hated or reviled or spurned.

But the Bible says that. Why? Two reasons. Here's the first reason. Because "your reward is great in heaven." Now, I'm just saying that is a big qualifier. Great. There are a lot of things in the Bible that talk about rewards. If you give a cup of cold water in the name of Christ you get a reward and you won't lose it. But it doesn't say great. If someone hates you because you're a Christian, that's painful. And when you get pained because you stand with Christ, guess what you're earning? You're earning a badge, a stripe, an insignia. You're getting something here. You're earning some stripes, let's put it that way. And God is rewarding you and you'll receive it one day. And here's the next thing. You're joining the ranks of the great. Because the next line is "so their fathers did to the prophets." So their fathers, the people who are hating you, their forefathers, they did to the prophets. The prophets, Daniel, Jeremiah,

Ezekiel. Think of these names. Malachi, Elijah, Moses, think about those names. Those are great people. You're starting to edge toward the great people when that happens to you. You may not feel like Amy Carmichael. You may not feel like, you know, Jim Elliot, but you understand you're moving in that direction when these things happen to you. Why? Because it's discomfort. It's pain. And Paul is listing his pain. He's a great one in the kingdom of heaven. Consider the sacrifices. I hope some of that's happening because you're bold enough to be devoted to Christ in an obvious way and you're devoted to his cause. So much so that people bump into that devotion and maybe they don't respond well to it.

Verse 26 of our passage. There's no missing the theme in verse 26 is there? "On frequent journeys," and when you're on those journeys, you're doing things for God you're "in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city." What's the theme? Please interactive 11:00 crowd, danger! Okay, let's just Letter 'B.' If there's danger and you're willing to be on a journey where there's danger, let's just call it this, "Risks to Danger." There's the spectrum. You take a risk. It can be small because you're a Christian. You take a small risk or it's a big risk. But there are dangers involved. Let's think of big risks. Let's say you're the mother of Amy Carmichael. Let's just think that 140 years ago, you're the mother of Amy Carmichael, 110 years ago, let's say she's just applied to the China Inland Mission. She gets rejected, and you say oh, there, there now, darling. You know, I guess the mission field is not for you. You have all these medical problems. So, you know, you should just stay here in Belfast and just get a good job, find a good husband, raise some kids, and just do the best you can. Be near the hospital if we can find you one. Right? That would be a lot less risky than saying, well, why don't you go to India, right? Go do that. Find some dirty, polluted city in India to work at. And yet that's exactly what she did. Even as a parent, seeing your kid off to the train to go off to the boat to head out to the mission field in India, that's taking a risk for the kingdom.

Or the small risk, maybe as a student who's identifying as a Christian with a hostile academic professor and, you know, your grades are just about to be shot. I've been through that. Standing up for Christ in a classroom. The worst grades I've gotten have been because in a secular university or college environment I've said something about Christianity and watched my grades plummet simply because of the bias against Christianity. Or a parent who imposes some rules on his kids for the sake of Christ and the other parents say you know what? I'm not even going to let my kids be with your kids because you're some weird fundamentalist Christian. Or maybe you're a family member who has to address a biblical issue in your family when the rest of the family is peace at any price and que será, será, you know, don't mess with anybody's stuff and no one should say anything. These are all big risks. They may have a whole lot less danger involved than what Paul was going through, but they're 21st-century Orange County realities and we can't discount them because there is risk involved.

Verse 27, Letter 'C,' it says, "in toil and hardships, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." All of those, if you think about it, they're all things that are deprivation. "Deprivation." And it starts with simple things like toil and hardship, which, you know, they're not simple, but they're fatigue, you're tired from fatigue to deep deprivations. If you go all night without sleep, maybe you do two in a row like the

Apostle Paul probably did, well you think that's deep deprivation. And you're not eating at all, or you're in the cold and exposure, you're rained on and you have no jacket and you have no tunic, right? That's terrible. So from fatigue and being tired to deep deprivation. Now maybe we're more on the fatigue side of things. But let me just say deprivation for every Christian in the modern era is true to some extent if you are devoted to Christ and his cause. Even all four things that we talk about around here, think about it, attending, connecting, serving and giving. Those are the four expressions of doing what we do around here in reaching, teaching and training, those four things. Think about it. And every one of them. If your faith to attend, connect, serve and give. Attending is coming to the big service on the weekend. You're here, right? And then you go to a small group where your chairs are face to face and then you serve, you have a ministry post, First Peter Chapter 4, you're a good steward of what God's invested in you. You do something, you have a ministry post and then you give financially.

All of those things are taking something from what you have and you can't use that. You have less time. You're not out walking your dog or doing whatever you could be doing right now. You've just lost that time. Sorry. Right? And then you go to another thing during the week and you lose that time, and then you're supposed to serve. Now you're doing game nights on Thursday nights in the Awana circle. You've lost that night out and then you're giving. Well, what could you do with that money? You could go buy a motorcycle or whatever. Now you can't do that. Think about it. I talk about the extra mile, extra dollar, extra hour. Well, if you're really doing that for Christ because you're devoted to him and his cause, well, you don't have those anymore. You lost the hour, you lost the dollar, and you lost the energy. So Christianity is about the deprivation. Now, I talked a couple of weeks ago about the reality of God who's REALLY good at paying back, and he gives energy when we don't have any and he loves to bless those who refresh others. I get all that. He "supplies seed to the sower," I understand that. But when you're taking that step and going without because you love God and his cause, I'm just saying that's the kind of thing that shows the sacrifice of devotion.

How about the last one here in the last two verses we haven't covered, verses 28 and 29. "Apart from the other things, there's the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who's weak, and I'm not weak? Who's made to fall, and I'm not indignant?" Let's just make a simple word here to start the spectrum. "Concerns," here's the other end to "severe pressure." Paul felt severe pressure, so much so that he used the word "anxiety." Right? "Daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches." Now, if you have all these churches that you've worked with as a missionary, that's a huge pressure on your shoulders. So "Concerns to Severe Pressure." And here's one way to not have all of that, right? Let's say you have a family. You already have some concern and pressure. But if you want to avoid more than that, if you don't want to have the pressure, men, let's just say of eight guys who are struggling with this problem and that temptation and in this bad marriage and their kid on drugs or whatever, never sign up to lead a small group in men's Bible study. Don't ever do it. Don't ever get involved in their life. Don't ever keep anybody accountable. You will never serve in that capacity.

Or ladies, if you don't ever want to worry about the soul of some woman grappling with her salvation and thinking about, you know, the Bible and the truth of God and dealing with

repentance and faith, and they're sweating out whether or not you're going to be able to see her snatch from the fire. Well, then never sign up to be a table discussion leader in Women in Faith. Don't ever do it because all that's going to be added to your plate. And of course, I'm being facetious because I want all of us to be devoted enough to Christ to add those kinds of things, because we're so devoted to the cause, we're all about it. I'll take that extra concern. And Paul says that's the stripes, that's the insignia, that's the badge. These things are the signs of real leadership and Paul says these are the things that make me a servant of Christ. The leaders who are trying to surreptitiously pull you into less devotion to Christ, who are making you be like them, avoiding the costs. Right? They're making you like themselves. That's not real Christianity. Real Christianity is Christ who, though he could have said, why do I have to serve them, took people who were less than him and made them something more, put their interests before his own.

Speaking of Amy Carmichael, she wrote a poem written in the first person as though Christ was speaking to the comfort-loving church. And since I haven't read it in a few years, let me read it again to you. It's her poem where she says,

Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land;
I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star.
Hast thou no scar?
Hast thou no wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers; spent,
Leaned Me against the tree to die; and rent
By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned.
Hast thou no wound?
No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And pierced are the feet that follow Me.
But thine are whole; can he have followed far
Who hast nor wound, no scar?

Yeah. There are a lot of people who love to put on the uniform of a servant of Christ but they have no signs of real love or leadership. And all I'm asking is that we have enough devotion to Christ to move us from just saying we love Jesus, to loving his cause, and loving his cause in saying we're willing to pay the price of being useful in his kingdom. In Acts Chapter 5, when they took the apostles and beat them because they were sharing the gospel, and then the Sanhedrin released them after having them beaten and let them go. In verse 41 of Acts Chapter 5, it says, "they left the presence of the council," the Sanhedrin," rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." Dishonor. They didn't even call it persecution. I'm just glad we were counted worthy enough to share in the kind of thing that Christ encountered. How tender and wimpy are we if what we get coming out of our mouth is complaint when there's a little discomfort or irritation, because we're trying to do something for the kingdom? They said we're so happy that Christ thought we were worthy to have a few

scars and wounds that match his. And they doubled down. Verse 42, "Every day in the temple and from house to house, they didn't cease teaching or preaching that the Christ is Jesus."

Lord, we thank you and we want to ingest these Communion elements with thanksgiving, knowing that you have done for us what we could not do for ourselves. Nothing we do could earn the merit that Christ has earned for us. We trust in him. We look to him. We see him as our only hope, our great High Priest. We come to you in his name and we thank you for our standing with you. You're very faithful. You will be faithful even when we stumble. You call us to remember that you're faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Thank you for that, God, for that renewed and daily reminder of your kindness and mercy toward us.

In Jesus' name. Amen.