

Monday, March 4, 2010 - Christ, The Center of My Life

I write this article tonight from my airline seat, high above Tennessee, as I come home from week 1 of what will end up being 16 straight weeks on the road. I hate traveling for business. I was on the road too much in the first 15 years of my married life. I was on the road way too much during the early years of my children's lives. Ego, arrogance and greed were the reason I chose the career path I embarked on many years ago, and it almost cost me my family. I was not much of a Christian, a husband or a father. Everything in life was about me: my success, my career, me making more money and, most importantly, me being better at my job than anyone else I worked with. I was "too young" to think about eternity. Those of the world, that I surrounded myself with, became an influence on me as opposed to my Christianity having an influence on them. My weakness and unwillingness to talk with them about Christ is something I will answer for in the Day of Judgment. I will stand before God with no excuse.

Humankind was always at the center of Christ's life and thoughts. As the final hours of his life were counting down, John 17 shows our Savior in the Garden praying. He first prayed for himself and the work that he had done, that it glorified God. He also prayed for his disciples. He knew the struggles and challenges that they were going to face after he was gone. Then he prayed for all believers that would come after him: you and me. Christ came to this earth as a human, "tempted in all things, yet without sin." He knows every temptation that we face, every difficulty of life.

Christ did not leave us alone. He didn't say "figure life out on your own." Peter describes the peace that we take from Christ's time on this earth when, in **I Peter 2:21-24**, he tells us, **"For to this you were called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps: Who committed no sin, neither was deception found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed."**

Does this show of love, sacrifice and commitment cause us to have Christ at the center of our lives? It is a reality that for many members of the church, Christianity is but a tiny part of their lives. We are "so busy"; who has time for church? We have school events, recreational activities, and employment concerns. These have push Christian dedication into the background. Others abandon Christ when things are going well in their secular life. As the Jews did, they tend to think that worldly success and wealth equate to a healthy spiritual life. Nothing could be further from the truth. Then there are those who

feel they are such a failure and they have done so many things wrong that “God couldn’t possibly want anything to do with them.”

We need to rejoice that we are counted worthy to face trials for being a Christian and use it as an opportunity to mature spiritually and show others how, with Christ as the focus of our life, we can glorify God in all things.

Trials become the testing ground of our faith. Jesus suffered the cross that He might arrive at the joy. The Hebrew writer states, **“Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let Us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** (Heb. 12:1-2)

When you feel you are so far gone from God that he would never be willing to take you back just remember Peter when Christ was taken away. Christ says that Peter will deny him 3 times before the cock crows. Once this occurs, Luke states, **“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said unto him, Before the cock crow this day thou shalt deny me thrice”** (Luke 22:61). Peter denied the deity of Christ, yet John 21 shows that Christ took him back; all was forgiven.

Consider Paul, one whose purpose in life was seeing to the persecution and murder of Christians. Yet the Lord knew what Paul could do for His cause if he just was “Christ Centered.”

1 Tim. 1:15-16 - This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life

It is a challenge to live a Christ-centered life. It requires us to live for a cause bigger than one’s self. It requires us to change our priorities and channel our efforts. It requires asking of ourselves, “Am I living as Jesus himself would live if he walked in my shoes?”

What does it mean to have Christ at the center of my life?

First, we must have our priorities in order. Christ tells us, in **Matthew 6:33**, **“Seek ye**

first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.” For the first century Christian, religious dedication was a consuming fire. It was not something to be worked in, on the weekend or whenever it was convenient. It was the essence of living.

The attitude of the first century Christian is clearly laid out for us in the New Testament. In **Acts 2:42-47**, we are told, **“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”**

Paul said in **Galatians 2:20**: **I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me**

In **Luke 9:23-26** Jesus tells us: **If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what advantage is it to a man, if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.**

A life, where the priority is on anything other Christ will, in the end, mean nothing.

A Christ-centered life demands obedience, just as Jesus was obedient. Obedience is essential if you wish to live eternally in heaven. In looking at the example Jesus set for us, **Philippians 2** tells us: **Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient [even] unto death, even, the death of the cross..**

Heb. 5:5-9 - So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." As He

also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek"; who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him

Think back to **Matthew 27**. What Christ was willing to suffer for us? What does our obedience consist of?

Living a Christ-centered life means I live a life of humility like Jesus. Philippians 2:3-4 declares: Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Galatians 3:28 tells us: **For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

The gospel, salvation and all that God has to offer is available to all mankind.

Living a Christ-centered life means loving, as Jesus loved. All the issues we have talked about, having you priorities right, living in obedience to God, and living with the humility that Jesus did, would come naturally if we loved as Jesus loved. He exhibited the type of love that is a willed love that does not depend upon the worthiness of its object. It is the kind of love that seeks the best for others, friend or foe.

Its fullest demonstration was the Lord on the cross – because he LOVED me so. Love is the basis of all godly characteristics and is emphasized over and over in the way Jesus lived his life. Christ himself tells us in **John 13:15**, **“For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”**

Christ provided the preview as to what will determine our eternal resting place when, in **Matthew 7:13-14**, he says, **“Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it.”** The enormity of this statement should not be missed by anyone. Few will spend eternity in heaven because they will not be willing to be

obedient to God Almighty in this life. **Few** will spend eternity in heaven because they will not be willing to submit to the truths found within the Holy Scriptures. **Few** will spend eternity in heaven because they will be unwilling to give up the lusts of the flesh, the pride of life and the riches of this earth for the Promise of God.

Will you choose to walk in the way that leads to eternal life or the way that leads to eternal destruction?

Among the last things that our Lord said was, **“I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20)**. But the presence of Christ in our life is conditional. The conditions are stated in the preceding part of the charge. He says, beginning in **verse 18: All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.**

Living for Jesus gives purpose, meaning, and direction for life. Too many lives are but wandering stars, rudderless ships, with no well-defined purpose.