

Are Christians Called to be Monomaniacs?

5th Sun. in Lent – 04/06/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Philippians 3:4b-14 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 8, [Paul says,] **“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”**

vv. 13-14, [Paul concludes,] **“... But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”**

Introduction

- ⊗ So, how many of you believe that God’s Word is the only correct and purest source of truth? ...
 - ➔ Is there more than one absolute truth? No! And, who is it that determines what is true and what is not? God!
 - ➔ But, is there more than one God? Absolutely not! So, it sounds like we’re all on the same page so far; that’s good.
- ⊗ So, if God says in His Word that you should stop doing this or that – you pick one of your favorites for now; one that you know is questionable in God’s eyes, but it’s one that you really like doing; if He says you should stop, is it okay then to keep on doing it? (We’ll just kind of keep that hanging out there for right now.)
 - ➔ Or to put it another way, if God says that this particular frame of mind that you have is of no good value for you as one of His people, but you still actually believe that it is valuable to you ... then is it okay to keep believing that way? ... Is it okay to knowingly and willfully live and believe in a manner that is against God’s perfect will and truth? No!
- ⊗ Are we still all on the same page? I think we are.
 - ➔ So, if you and I are all saying that there is only one God; and that there is only one truth; and that living our lives according to that truth is what must be our first and most important focus in life, then does that mean that you and I as Christians are called to be “monomaniacs”?
- ⊗ I know, most of you, except for the hardcore internet cheaters out there that just couldn’t wait for me to get to this point in the sermon, so you had to look up that word on your own in advance; most of you are probably asking, “What in the world is a monomaniac?”
 - ➔ Well, the Oxford Dictionary says that a monomaniac is “a person exhibiting an exaggerated or obsessive enthusiasm for or preoccupation with one thing.” So, are we Christians called to be “obsessed” with just one thing; or in this case one person – Jesus Christ?
 - ➔ I know, you’re probably struggling with that word “obsessed” which is where the “maniac” part of monomaniac comes into the equation.
- ⊗ But did you know that, in the New Testament Bible both Jesus and Paul were accused of being “maniacs”? The Greek word is “μαίνομαι” (mainomī) which means to be “out of one’s mind” or “insane”.
 - ➔ In John 10:20 the Jews said that Jesus was being a “maniac”; acting “insane” because He said that only He could lay down His life and then “take it up again” (Jn. 10:18), which of course, you and I know is referring to His death on the cross and His resurrection on the third day – the absolute foundation of our faith and salvation.
 - ➔ And in Acts 26:24-25, Paul is speaking to Festus, the Roman Governor over Judea in Paul’s day, about how the prophets foretold that it was necessary that Jesus, the Christ would suffer,

die and rise from death (Acts 26:22-23) when Festus says, “Paul you are ‘μανίαν’; out of your mind...”. But Paul said, “I am not ‘μαίνομαι’ (mainomī) a maniac...but I am speaking true and rational words.”

✘ So friends, what is God calling us to be about as His people?

I. God says, Love only Me!

✘ Well, Paul says here in our Epistle Reading today that there is only one thing that matters. That everything else is what he calls “rubbish” in verse eight. That Greek word for “rubbish” is “σκύβαλον (skibalon)” which literally means “dung” or “human waste”.

➔ In fact, this not something new with Paul. In the Old Testament, Yahweh says in Deuteronomy 6:5-6, “You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” Notice there how God uses the word “all” three times to emphasize that our love for Him must be all-encompassing! The Hebrew there word for soul – “נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh)” – describes a person’s “life, soul, and breath” – what makes us a living being. So every ounce of what we are about is to be about loving Yahweh our God.

➔ And Jesus, in Matthew 22:37-38 quotes Deuteronomy 6 and says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” In fact, in Luke 10:28, when a Jewish Lawyer quoted this same command to Jesus, Jesus “said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’”

✘ You see, the Scriptural evidence seems to be pretty cut and dry that our all-encompassing focus must be to love the Triune God with all of our heart, soul, mind and might. So, are Christians called to be monomaniacs?

II. “Knowing” (believing) I am worthless (v.8).

✘ Paul tells us here today, that the answer to that question is based upon what we “know” to be true – 1) about ourselves; 2) about “Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 8); and 3) about our Christian lives as we wait for Jesus’ return.

➔ He starts out in verse eight saying, “Indeed, I count everything as loss...”.

✘ So, what is this “everything” that he’s talking about? It’s all of the things that he just finished listing in verses 4-7; all of the things that defined Paul’s identity from his circumcision on his eighth day of life, to his heritage as an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, to his reputation as a Pharisee, to his great passion and zeal as a persecutor of those early Christians, and even what he had been taught to believe mattered most in his relationship with God; that the only way to God was by following all of the Jewish rules and Biblical Commandments to perfection. This really was Paul’s “heart, mind and soul” at the time.

➔ But now Paul says things are different. Now in truth, he knows and believes that all of those things are nothing more than “rubbish/dung”.

✘ He admits though that letting it all go wasn’t / still isn’t easy. In verse eight Paul says that for Jesus sake, “I have suffered...; suffered the loss of all things.”

➔ But you know, the truth often does really hurt. And the truth for Paul was that he was putting himself; his career advancement; and especially his own prideful belief that he could be good enough to impress God and earn his own righteousness with God – he was putting all of that in front of what God actually taught in His Word.

➔ Paul believed that his life was all about him! But now, he knew, that was a pitiful way to live, because he would, in fact, always fall short. He would never be able to live up to his own

expectations, let alone God's standard of perfection and righteousness. For Jesus clearly proclaimed in Matthew 5:48, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

✘ Well Paul...; well every one of us, "Good luck with that!"

III. "Knowing Christ Jesus My Lord" (v.8)

✘ But, Paul continues in verse eight, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Then he tells us even more, "For [Jesus'] sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as dung, in order that I may gain Christ."

➔ He is very clear that his entire life has been turned upside down and inside out, and it's all because of Jesus and through Jesus! His values; what he now knows and believes is most important have all been changed.

➔ Now, his life is no longer about the earthly, physical or purely personal, individualistic things. No, everything for Paul now, is about Christ! He calls it "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." The Greek word for "knowing" is "γνῶσις (gnosis)" and it is talking here about so much more than just understanding a bit of factual knowledge. This "knowing" of Jesus is describing a personal, spirit-filled relationship with Christ; what we would call a saving faith; an all-encompassing trust and belief in Jesus as God, Savior and Lord.

✘ And we know this is what Paul is talking about because he tells us in verse nine what is singularly important to him. It is that he is found to be in Jesus, "not having a righteousness of my own...but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...". And what specifically is this righteousness "from God"? 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, "For our sake [God] made Him to be sin who knew no sin" (that's Jesus), "so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." That's enough to entirely blow a person's mind – that Jesus actually gives you and me His own righteousness; His own good works; His own death to pay for our sin and His own resurrection to give us His victory over death once and for all!

➔ This is what Paul is getting at when He tells us in verse 10 what the four things are that you and I receive when He wraps us up in His own righteousness. It means 1) "that I may know [Christ]" – that He is God; that He came to fulfill the Law; to suffer and die for my worthlessness; and 2) "that I may know...the power of His resurrection" – which is the assurance that yes, I will rise from death at His return; and 3) "that I...may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death" – that is, in faith I am joyfully willing to give all that I have; my life, myself and my goods in service to God and in love for others all around me; and 4) that in the end "I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

✘ And how and where and when do I receive all of these things? It is in my baptism, where God gifts it to us all in the package of His water and Word; wrapping the saving, forgiving, purifying, resurrection and eternal-life-gift of Jesus and His perfect righteousness around you/me personally and tying it all up with the ever-active; always-present bow of His Holy Spirit, who lives in, with and through us ever moment of every day!

IV. "Knowing" There's Work for Me to Do.

✘ That's a lot for us to process from Paul isn't it? Of course it's all important. It's all life-changing for us. And that's why Paul's final words in our text today are so helpful, because Paul tells us exactly how receiving Christ's righteousness makes a difference that impacts our everyday life as believers in Christ.

➔ It means that my Christian life is NOT one where I'm just sitting in my "religious recliner" or my padded and protected pew only on Sunday morning and thinking, "Now that I know Jesus Christ as my Savior, I am living on easy street. I've got nothing to do but just sit around singing hymns and thinking about Jesus and doing whatever I want to do that makes me happy."

- No, Paul knows that even as God now looks at him – and the rest of us in Jesus, and sees only the perfect righteousness of Jesus for Paul’s salvation and ours, that his and our lives here in the Christian Church are lives, as he says in verse 10, of daily “sharing in Christ’s suffering”; where we are harassed by the devil and his constant temptations; where we are challenged by those who want to defame, slander, and lie about Jesus and His desire to save all souls.
- It also means that, because we have received the gift of Christ’s resurrection, making eternity with Him as our greatest prize, that now God leads us in and beyond those difficulties to set our priorities in such a way that every day we weigh our desire for the things of this world against our eternal treasure in heaven and we honestly see those earthly things as being no more than rubbish/dung. That’s what the “upward call” is all about in verse 14.
- ⊗ Our heart, mind, soul and strength is now singularly focused on giving priority to God’s values and wisdom instead of the world’s wisdom and values. Now, in Christ, we don’t think about, “What do I ‘deserve’?”, but instead, “How can I best serve my Lord with the gifts that He has given me so generously?”
 - Now, I see the value; in fact, I crave every opportunity I can to take time to read and study God’s Word in Scripture; to communicate with Him in prayer and to share His love and saving work with others in my conversations and even in the way that I spend my free time. Yes, “knowing” Christ now in this way means that this life we have is one where we daily come to Him in repentance and we receive the help of His Spirit in living, speaking and thinking as one who “knows” without question that we have the power of Christ’s resurrection coursing through every fiber of our being.
- ⊗ This how Paul can finish today and say, “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (vv.13-14).

Conclusion

- ⊗ So, are we Christians called to be monomaniacs?
 - Well, Christ’s death and resurrection is wrapped around us, which is the call of His grace that we have now received; which means that this is now a joy-filled call of freedom and rescue from sin, death and the devil. Knowing that, how can we help but be excited to live and breathe every moment of every day for Jesus.
 - And yes, Jesus is our everything, because He gave everything for us; to be with us here and now, and forevermore.
- ⊗ So, if that makes me a monomaniac; one that is singularly seen by the world as being “out of my mind for Christ”, as Paul was, then yes, I am happy; I am proud to be a monomaniac for Jesus! How about you? Amen.