

August 24, 2014 “The Dominant Chord” Pt 12 1st Cor. 13

This chapter is first and foremost about how to serve Jesus well. About being a disciple. That’s what we are, disciples, learners, students, followers. It is in that sense, as a chapter about following Jesus that this chapter is about Christian ethics. The blue print is pointed and small. Highly focused. The most excellent way of serving God, following Jesus, walking in the Spirit of God, is to be loving in an extreme fashion. Loving as Jesus loved and loves us. Even unto a cross. Execution. Not just for the whole of our lives, but even unto death. Love God. Love your neighbour. And do so sacrificially.

And in answer to the question how long are we to love others sacrificially, the apostle gives the answer, until Jesus comes, and then beyond that. Until Jesus comes and then in His presence. One of my favourite sayings is “you cannot out generous God.” That is just another way of saying you cannot out love Him. But the apostle Paul says in this chapter that if we have an eye on eternity, and are really concerned about pleasing God with the way we live...that is what we should try to do. Love as God loves and even try to go beyond. There are no limitations to the extent to which we have been called to love other people. In little ways, in big ways, short term, long term. Remember the song, “If you really love me, love me all the way.” To the very end which is not the end at all but as

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said as he was led from his German cell in 1945, to the execution room..."for me, this is the beginning."

One of the greatest things that will occur when Jesus returns, or when we find ourselves in God's presence because we have died in the interim, is that there will be full disclosure. Suddenly things will be clear. We will in that moment discover the degree to which we are loved by our Creator, Redeemer and Friend. That will be part of suddenly knowing God, the way we know ourselves...no secrets. Such wonder.

This morning we close this series as we turn our attention to the 13th verse of the 13th chapter. Paul drags us back to the present. In a sense back to reality. Because the fact is it is in the present that we live. Tomorrow is not here. Yesterday is gone, never to be recovered. Here in the now, there are three characteristics of the Christian life. Faith, Hope and Love.

To be Christian, to define ourselves as Christians, which by the way is far more important than defining our Christian experience with any of the denominational labels. I am Presbyterian for some distinct reasons! Be certain of that! But first and foremost I am Christian. And I am rightly defined as Christian because I believe Jesus. I believe in Him, but I believe what He taught and what he revealed. Being Christian

starts and ends with the reality of faith. People including myself like to ask how much faith, 51 %? 75? 90? This is not a math exam. I believe. I believe Jesus is God, that God was in Christ. I believe He died for me, to save me, I obviously believe He died for you. And because He died for you, He rose for you. Jesus Christ is Lord. That's another way of saying all of the above. I am and I strive to be His servant in all things. That's what we have in common. We are not talking about whether or not I am good or not. This is not about being good. It is about being a believer. In the present...my life is characterized by faith.

And therefore it is also characterized by hope. Jesus died for me and He rose for me. I live in hope of His Second coming, or should I die before He comes, the reality of heaven. Being with God in that other realm beyond this world, different from the realm or realms God created. I live in hope and I will die when it comes time, if it comes time, in the hope of what Jesus has taught us about life that is eternal. One of the things hope frees Christians to do is to take risks. We do not always play it safe. We do not always protect our lives as though this living in the here and now were the most precious thing we have and the only option.

The easiest way I find to explain that to people is to talk about what I was like before faith, and what came with

faith. As a young man with a measure of musical talent, with certain gifts as an entertainer....my primary goal was to make a million dollars. As a fortune goes that may seem like a modest goal...we both know what athletes and entertainers who make it big can and do earn. Robin Williams was a wealthy man with resources I cannot even imagine possessing. But with all that he possessed, he could not live with his life as it was. That's why he killed himself. I wanted to never want for money again. When I came to faith in Jesus I began to walk down a very different road. Among other things it has led me here. Living in the way, in Jesus led me to Barbara. One of the prayers I pray regularly is that she might know how much I love her. I am certainly aware of the treasure I have received in being loved by her. I live in hope. Our shared life is life in Jesus. I have never made what the world would call a wise career decision. I volunteered to serve in the north, what we called a mission post. Home Missions. But mission post nonetheless. I could have candidate for an important church. That would have been a wise career move. What I sought and seek is not to build a career...but to be and do what Jesus wants me to be and do. Here on earth, I pursue Heaven. And again this is not about being good or idealistic. It is about living faithfully, filled with hope.

The reason I am still alive is the reality of love. The love that God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit has poured out upon me.

The love and comfort that God gave me and gives me in Barbara, the love that God gave me and gives in the people to whom He has led and leads me. I don't have a lot of money. But I am rich when it comes to what matters. Some people tell me I am always happy. Not really true. I have good days and bad days. When I remember what I know about faith, hope and love I am very happy. But like most people I have lapses. Not moments when I forget, but moments when I overlook what treasure really is. Some of you have heard about the left hand drawer in my desk. It is a drawer into which I put notes, cards, letters, emails. The left top drawer of my desk is where I keep reminders of blessings received...moments of ministry where lives were affected. Here in Stirling I recently met a young man that I had not seen for 43 years. He was a teenager in my Young People's Bible Study group in Cochrane. He wanted me to know I was part of his life change. He is very involved in one of the churches in our area. A moment when I got it right. Loving God. Loving my neighbour. A moment when I was being watched by someone, and I had little awareness of how important it was.

This is real life stuff. Faith in Jesus. Hope through Christ. Loving like Jesus. Here is where we have to be careful in the handling of verse 13. On the one hand we need to notice what Paul does say. On the other hand we need to notice what he does not say. Both reveal important truths. When Branch

Ricky brought Jacky Robinson to play baseball in Montreal, the only black man in an all white sport, Branch Ricky and Jacky Robinson were both doing something profound. If you haven't seen the movie 42 you should watch it. The owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers was a profoundly Christian man. A reader of Scripture. Branch Ricky taught me that in the Bible, God says, "Love your neighbour" 8 times. An aging Branch Ricky saw Jacky Robinson as a second chance to do what is right in the eyes of God, and that mattered to Branch Ricky. Here in the 13th verse we are told love is greater than faith, and greater than hope. When you love somebody, really love them, as Jesus loved and loves us, lives change. And I mean miracles happen. Love is greater than faith. Love is greater than hope in that sense. That's what Paul says. He had seen it over and over. When in ministry he loved someone, lives were touched and lives were changed. In that sense love is greater than faith or hope. In fact Paul has said in this chapter faith that can move mountains, bereft of love....leaves us as nothing. Accomplishing nothing. That's what Paul says.

Having said that,... Paul does not say....faith hope love , the greatest of these is love....take your pick. He does not mean and does not say faith is not important. He is not saying faith is less than crucial. Faith is crucial. Faith is where the Christian experience begins. Faith causes one to leave nets and boats and follow Jesus to learn more, see more, and learn how

to love. This chapter is not about love as a force you can control or create without faith. In fact it is the faith that recognizes Jesus as Lord that has hope beyond life lived here, that dares to risk loving when loving could lead to death or a million other kinds of catastrophe. Loving someone else, the way you love yourself is the riskiest thing a person can do. And some of us, maybe most of us, would never take that risk were it not for faith in Jesus, and the hope that He affords.

Let us pray....

Lord Jesus, we bow before you in this quiet moment because to some degree we believe. The story of the cross and the open tomb, the crucifixion and resurrection have filled us with hope, we otherwise would not have. We praise your name that these things are true. You have called us to love people we meet the way You loved people during Your earthly ministry....sacrificially. When it hurts to do so, give us vision that we might see we are on ground where you are Lord, and therefore where there is healing for our pain. When we fear what might happen if we love sacrificially help us to see that eternity hangs in the balance, that we can change the balance, that lives might be altered, souls saved.

Lord most of all, continually provide us with reminders of the degree to which you love us. It is in being loved we discover the power of love to redeem. It is being loved by You

that we discover the degree to which we treasure being near You and with You. Claim our hearts as well as our minds. May our lives be used in Your service. May our appetite for the most excellent way of serving You become insatiable. Amen