

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on 1 Corinthians 15:50-16:4 on November 20, 2016 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: 1 Corinthians 15—a 21st Century Church
Today's Focus: Giving Ourselves Fully to the Work of the Lord

“Mission: Are You In?”

In the name of Jesus, the Commander in Chief of angel armies, King of kings, and Lord of lords!

It's good to be back with you all. Last weekend I was in North Carolina, and although I got to look out at the Atlantic ocean late Sunday afternoon, I wasn't there on vacation. I was there to preach and give a presentation to help another church consider its mission. The church is in Jacksonville, NC. Jacksonville is a city with a population of about 70,000 and of that number about 50,000 are there because of Camp Lejeune—a Marine Corps base. Anyone here ever been stationed there?

Now the marines know about giving themselves fully to a mission. The mission of Camp Lejeune is to maintain combat-ready units for expeditionary deployment. This is serious stuff. It matters. Camp Lejeune prepares combat ready marines to be deployed in a moment's notice often to carry out a mission against the enemies who want to destroy us.

What the apostle Paul is reminding us today is that the church of Jesus also has a mission. Are you in? In a way coming to church is an opportunity for us to be equipped for combat against the spiritual enemies of darkness as we are deployed out into the world at work, at school, at home or wherever we go in whatever our vocations are. When we leave this ministry center we really are heading out into our personal mission field to make a difference in the name of Jesus.

Verse 58 is the key verse I want to highlight as we conclude our study of 1 Corinthians today. At the end of chapter 15 the apostle Paul says, ⁵⁸**Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

Now the first word of this verse, what is it? *Therefore*. You remember what question I want you to ask when you see the word *therefore* in the Bible? “What's it *there for*?” It's a word that draws a conclusion. Here it's the implication of everything that the apostle Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, everything Pastor Bill talked about in his sermon last week.

Last week Pastor Bill shared the acronym ALIVE - Always living in view of eternity. This is now exactly the perspective that we can have—that this life here on earth is not all there is because our great common enemy, death, has been defeated. Death will not get the last laugh on our

lives for us who believe in Jesus. Death will not get to have the final word. Death has lost. Jesus has won!

He's our Savior. He's our champion. He's our sin stomper. He's our Satan silencer. He's the King of kings who has conquered the king of terrors—death itself. The center of our whole worldview now is resurrection. Our perspective is eternity. And though outwardly our bodies might be wasting away yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day through God's word and sacraments and promises like this: Paul says, ⁵⁰ **I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.** ⁵¹ **Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—** ⁵² **in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** ⁵³ **For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.** ⁵⁴ **When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."**

⁵⁵ **"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"**

⁵⁶ **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.** ⁵⁷ **But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

⁵⁸ **Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

Man, this is good news, isn't it!? We are eternal co-champs with Jesus Christ! Our God is alive and he is sitting on the throne of heaven over all history. This world in its present form is passing away along with all its technology and all its trophies and all its twitter wars but we look ahead to enjoying forever happiness and forever peace in heaven. My question is...how come we don't act like it?

Maybe you've noticed but right now a lot of people (many Christians included) are acting like the most significant thing in the history of humanity was not the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead on Easter, but the result of this year's presidential election on November 8th. Many people are groaning or protesting because their candidate didn't win, calling people out, pointing fingers, and even crying. Others are gloating, trolling, or making fun of millennials. But let me ask you this...how much good does this do? Has your groaning or gloating moved anyone you know closer to Christ? Does being overly occupied with earthly politics open more avenues

for conversations about eternal things? Does it make you more ALIVE—always living in view of eternity?

The average person checks their smartphone roughly 110 times a day, or once about every 8 minutes while awake. That's astonishing. Friends, when's the last time you checked your smart phone and came away feeling smarter—much less more compassionate, more generous, happier or more fulfilled? When's the last time using technology helped you to more thoughtfully understand someone else's point of view or prompted you to spend time in prayer for people in positions of authority?

There was a lot of conversation this week about all the fake news on social media like Facebook. Has reading and sharing fake news on Facebook led anyone you know to care more deeply about the one book that can strengthen faith—the Bible? When's the last time your use of technology enabled everyone in your family to grow closer to each other with quality time or facilitate more time in conversations about God and his importance for your life?

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

It's hard to give yourself fully to the work of the Lord when the devil's doing such a good job of distracting us, isn't it? But it's also easy to get discouraged. Maybe you've tried inviting family members to church but they won't come. Maybe you've tried to bring your family together around God's word only to be ignored. Maybe you've tried witnessing your faith with a friend who is getting sick and tired of your attempts. Maybe you've tried your best to repair a relationship but nothing you do is ever quite good enough. Maybe you've tried to lovingly say something on social media only to have someone else completely misread your tone. Maybe you've even preached a sermon and gone home wondering if it's having any impact at all.

It's easy to feel discouraged. It's easy to wonder...why even try? Is it worth it? Should I just give up or give in? Friends, what is God saying to you today? **⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

Did you hear that? **Your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** Our mission as a church? Not in vain. My sermons? Not in vain. Your prayers? Not in vain. Your love? Not in vain. Your offerings? Not in vain. Your volunteering or serving others? Not in vain. Your life? Not in vain. Why? Because our Redeemer lives! Because Jesus Christ, our Savior, lives. The tomb is still empty.

If you think you've blown God's plan for your life, rest in this...you're not that powerful! I know there's a lot of bad news out there. A lot of fear. A lot of frustration. A lot of hysteria. It's hard not to feel it, isn't it? But friends, don't forget, we have the Good News! We have forgiveness

through Jesus. We have nothing to fear. Our eternal future is secure which means we have nothing to lose here on this earth. Sharing this hope is our mission. Are you in?

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Giving ourselves *fully* includes a lot of things. In one sense it includes *whatever* we do now. Remember this verse from earlier in 1 Corinthians-- **“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God”** (1 Corinthians 10:31). So everything we do in life is an opportunity now to worship God. This is cool because even if no one else notices your effort in Jesus’ name, God does. Your entire life, every choice we make, matters to God. And maybe that’s why right after talking about giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, the apostle Paul also brings up the topic of *giving*.

He teaches us some basic principles of giving an offering. He says, **16 Now about the collection for the Lord’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ² On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.**

There are two principles I want to highlight here briefly. The first is proportional giving. **“Each one of you...in keeping with your income.”** In other words in keeping with what you have, not with what you don’t have. God has blessed all of us differently. How has he blessed *you*? This week as we celebrate Thanksgiving is a great time to take an inventory of how richly God has blessed you this past year—spiritually as well as financially. Use this time to consider how God has blessed you with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Use this time to evaluate your commitment to the mission God has given us together as his church. Are you in? If you give online now’s a good time to re-evaluate your giving in view of how God has blessed you so your giving isn’t just on auto-pilot. Maybe you’re in a different season of life where you’re able to give more than the year before. Re-consider what percentage you’re able to give cheerfully in order to give yourself fully to the work of the Lord and then know that God is well pleased with whatever that amount. Because the other principle that Paul highlights here is priority.

“On the first day...set it aside.” What priority does God want you to place on giving an offering? First place, before other expenses pile up. So ask yourself, is your offering a leftover gift or a first portion priority? As a matter of priority, Jesus said money has a lot to do with your heart. What you do with your money is actually a mirror of what’s in your heart. Money reveals our true priorities in life. Are you ALIVE – always living in view of eternity?

I mentioned that I went to the North Carolina last weekend. What I didn’t mention is that I flew down there on my own dime. To be fair one guy gave me \$15 in cash and I got to eat some yummy Carolina BBQ but I paid for my trip down there out of pocket and I volunteered to do

this because I wanted help them with their mission and didn't want anything to hinder that. Why? Because when I take an inventory of how God has blessed me, blessed us as a church family, over this past year in getting to build this ministry center and adding a second pastor and seeing over a hundred more people regularly attending our church...I couldn't help it.

They're a congregation there in Jacksonville, NC that's been around 25 years. They still worship in a little storefront. Two years ago there were just 40 people. Now there are 86. They're closing on land next week and dreaming about building a church. But it's hard for them to see it because they're still a small group. Check it out {pics} And because 80% of the congregation is marines they're turning over their membership every 3 or 4 years. Imagine that—you work so hard to bring a family into your church and then they move on. Man, is it worth it? Is it worth it to give yourself fully to the work of the Lord when it seems like you just can't get ahead?



I didn't know it last Sunday but there in the congregation I was preaching to a family who had just experienced the most painful loss of their lives. A 33 year marine died a couple days before rather suddenly due to some pretty freaky health conditions. He left behind a young widow and two children who were there in church. It was a powerful reminder that death can strike any one of us, at any time.

But what did this young widow and her children hear in church? They heard of their Savior who died for us to take away our sins so that nothing stands between us and God. About a Savior who defeated death so we could be together again in heaven. About a joy that we can have which no election results can rattle, which no diagnosis can deflate, which not even the suddenness of death or the uncertainties of this life can deny because Jesus was won an eternal victory. He lives and he reigns for us.

So what is our mission? **We want to share Christ's victory with today's people, loving them enough to meet them where they are.** Our church's mission isn't to convert people to our side of the political spectrum. Our church's mission isn't to convince anyone who should be their President. Our church's mission is to help people see their need for a Savior. In love we want reach people wherever they're at so that one day they'll be where Jesus is at in heaven. That's our mission. Are you in? Amen.