

by Dr. Andrew Corbett

What is worth giving your life up for? Your family? Your country? Your sporting team? To give your life for something is to live with purpose. It becomes the reason for sacrifice, the defining element in all your goals, and the reason you work/study/train.

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Acts 20:24

The Apostle Paul lived for a cause. He gave his life for something. Psychologists tell us that a person will give their life for something if the reward outweighs the cost. The tragedy of this reality is that too many people have fallen for a false Bill of Goods where they have been led to believe that there is a cheaper cost to pay and a greater reward to get if they would give their life for a lie dressed up as attractive truth. This is what Christ faced when He was about to commence His public ministry.



When the Devil tempted Christ he attempted to lure Him with *fame*, *wealth*, and *power*. Do this miracle! I'll make you famous! I'll give You the kingdoms of this world! Or, turn

these stones to bread (a miracle, or display of 'power'), throw Yourself off the pinnacle of the Temple (fame, or 'popularity'), bow down and worship me (control, or 'influence').

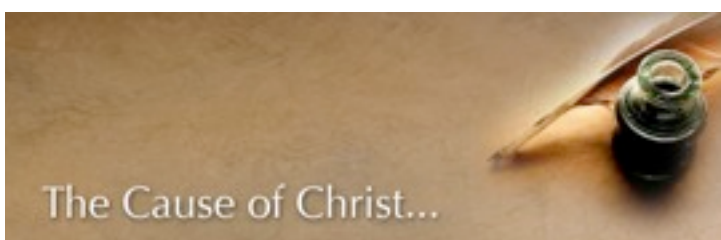
Unlike us, Christ didn't yield to the Devil's temptations. We often *negotiate* with the Devil when he tempts us. We negotiate that if we perform a miracle, people will turn to Christ. We negotiate that if we were to become famous, we would have a greater platform for more people to hear about God. We negotiate that if we made one little compromise we could have more political influence. How many gifted preachers have sold their gift to the highest paying scheme only to end up spiritually divorced from God and *His* power? How many gifted singers have negotiated their way to stardom only to end up never acknowledging God anymore or using their voice to worship *Him*? How many aspiring politicians have entered Parliament and negotiated away their way to more power only to end becoming spiritually powerless?

If the Devil offered you a \$1,000,000 to never go to church again, would you accept his offer? What if it was a \$100,000?

*“It's not surprising that everyone has a price.
What is surprising is how low it is!”*

Anonymous

Christ did not yield to the Devil's temptations of fame, popularity, or power, in its various forms. He was committed to a greater cause! This greater cause would indeed result in Christ achieving great miracles, popularity, and power. But, He would do it God's way - not the Devil's! (Perhaps ironically, the various temptations - miraculously produce food, defy death, and receive kingdoms, would be done by Christ anyway, but for God's glory not the Devil's.)



We face devilish temptations to sell out our gifts/abilities/talents and justify it as being for "God's glory". But if we could see what Christ saw and discover what Christ knew about

God's ways, we may be less inclined to do this. We tend to think big, popular, loud are the means to achieving what God wants. But the Cause of Christ was repeatedly characterized by small, unpopular, and quiet ministry.

*For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Isaiah 55:9

Christ's Cause was to redeem a people and form them into His Body, the Church, His Bride (Matthew 16:18). This is what He gave His life for.

...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...

Ephesians 5:25b

After Christ encountered the Devil in the Wilderness Temptation, He returned "in the power of the Holy Spirit" to Washington DC, New York, Los Angeles, London, Berlin, Sydney... Capernaum (Matthew 4:13)!

He came out of the Wilderness, returned to His home town of Nazareth, attended the Synagogue then moved His base to *Capernaum* which was a small fishing village. Around the time of Christ it may have had a population of less than a few hundred (it is estimated that at its peak it was no more than 1500 people) and more probably less than a hundred residents! The



remains of the synagogue (pictured above), where Christ taught each Sabbath during the first year of His public ministry, could have comfortably held 60 or so worshipers. This is where Christ chose to launch His Cause! The Synagogue would become the template for the emerging Christian Church. It was in a small synagogue that Christ chose to establish what would become the pattern for His Church. In the Synagogue they-

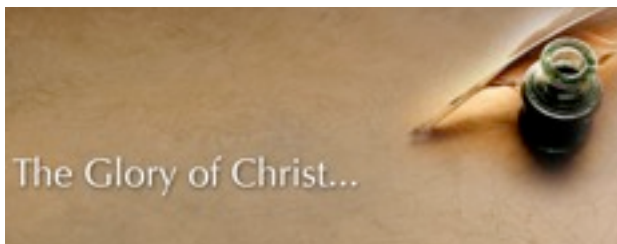
- 🕒 Sang their worship
- 🕒 Read from Scripture
- 🕒 Prayed
- 🕒 Received Rabbinic Teaching
- 🕒 Pronounced a Blessing

Christ made it His “custom” to be in the Synagogue each Sabbath.

¶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.

Luke 4:16

How foolish this move must have looked to the Devil! Perhaps the Devil felt relieved that Christ did not reveal Himself to the world from a more prominent platform. But it's often the wisdom of God which appears foolish to the world (1Cor. 1:18). You may be gifted with great leadership skills and it might seem natural/reasonable/wise to employ your leadership gift in the corporate world. After all, corporate high-fliers are among the most unreached people on the planet - someone's got to reach them! And for some, this will indeed be their call. But for most, God's gifts of leadership are to be used within a local church. Perhaps such gifts might seem wasted on 50 people in an obscure struggling church. It's easy to see how it could have appeared that the gift of God's Son to the world looked wasted on the small congregation gathering each Sabbath in the Capernaum Synagogue!



The Church is not only the Cause of Christ, it is also the (source of the) Glory of Christ-

As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

2Cor. 8:23

to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

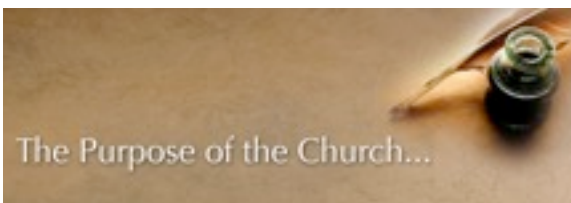
Eph. 3:21

By participating in the Church, we are magnifying the glory of Christ. You may wonder how being a part of a small (or even a larger) group of worshipers each Sunday could possibly add to the glory of Christ, but your worshipful wonder can turn to wonderful worship when you realise that this is how God has ordained for His Cause and Glory to be manifested in the earth. Therefore, when you sing, sing! When you pray, pray! When you receive the Word, *let it dwell richly in you!*

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Col. 3:16

The Gospel is the announcement of the Cause of Christ (which is founded upon His life, work, death, resurrection and ascension). If you want to follow Christ and take up His Cause, you must love the Gospel.



Indeed, the very purpose of the Church is punctuated by the Gospel. The great Apostle Paul gave his life for *the Cause of Christ* - which is another way of saying that he gave his life for *the Church* - which is another way

of saying that he gave his life for *the Gospel*.

I do it all for the sake of the gospel...

1Cor. 9:23

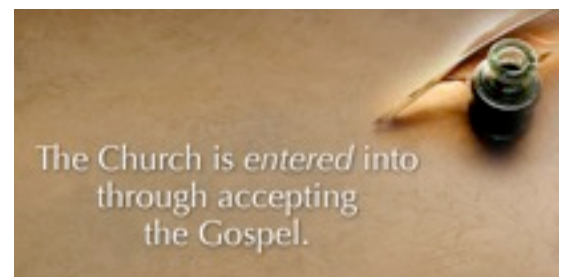
Note how important the Gospel is to the Cause of Christ-

Admission into the Church is by *accepting* the Gospel.

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

Eph. 1:13

The Church is *built up* through the preaching of the Gospel - not merely the rehashing of “The Four Spiritual Laws”, but the entire Gospel (the Old Testament forms the background to it, the Gospels describe it, and the Epistles elaborate it). There is an error taught in some circles that the teaching of Christ contained



in the Gospels was not intended for His followers, but was only ever meant for His immediate Jewish audience. This is what we might call ‘hyper-dispensationalism’ (the idea that parts of God’s Word are only for a period or ‘dispensation’ of time and is then superseded by God’s next revelation of His Word). It is the responsibility of

pastors and Bible teachers to show their congregation how God's Word backdrops, paints and displays, the Gospel. In doing this, the church will be empowered to minister effectively for Christ as they hear, heed and share the Gospel.



The Gospel enables us to *endure* for Christ. The Gospel teaches us that we are to trust and love God despite our circumstances. It teaches us that there will be persecution against us. It teaches us that we may have to endure tribulation for the sake of Christ.

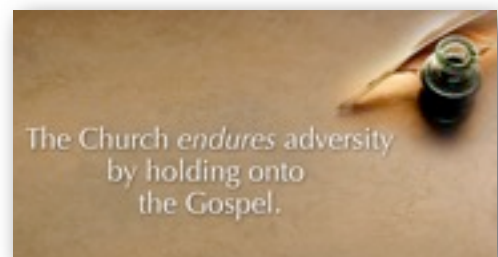
I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

The Church is extended through proclaiming the Gospel.

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

Acts 14:21





"First and foremost, before we can minister to people through the church, we need to be the church to each other.

REDISCOVERING CHURCH, Lynne & Bill Hybels, page 191

The Cause of Christ, the Church, is charged with sacred duty of delivering the only means possible for people to be reconciled with God and made fit for heaven: the Gospel. For this reason we say that *the local church is the hope of the world!*

Yet local churches are made up largely of untrained volunteers who have to balance work, family, recreation and rest into their level of commitment to their local church. What a risk God has taken by entrusting this sacred responsibility to such people! Anyone who does excel in their church-based ministry is often encouraged into "full-time" ministry or ministry beyond their local church. If you a worship musician or blossoming preacher and feel that the sage of your local church is not "big enough" for you, remember: *Capernaum*. The point of our existence is not our *self*-promotion but our *selfless* promotion of Christ!

And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not...

Jer. 45:5

This is especially difficult for very talented people to commit to. They are often brighter, quicker, more learned than those they minister with. They look at their local church and see 40 - 70 people (the global average for a church) who they feel neither appreciate them - nor understand where they are coming from. *Remember Capernaum.*

It is in this context (of all the problems, difficulties and challenges of a local church) that Christ gave His life. It is in this context that the apostles gave their lives. It is in this context that the great church leaders and statesmen have ministered often at the cost of their lives. But even realising this may even frustrate those struggling to commit to their local church because we do tend to focus on *the great* to illustrate the point of giving your life for the cause of Christ.

With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.

2Cor. 8:18

For every “great” servant of Christ whom history has honoured, there have been ~~thousands~~, hundreds of thousands who have given their lives for the Cause of Christ without any recognition! Paul refers to such a one in Second Corinthians 8:18 when omits to name “*the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.*” The ‘brother’? We can only speculate as to whom this might have been. But if we spend too much time speculating we actually miss the point of what the New Testament is saying. This ‘brother’ didn’t preach *to become famous*, he became famous because he preached. The Devil offered Jesus fame and Jesus rejected the offer and ended up becoming famous anyway - even though He based His campaign from Capernaum! God knows how to honour those who honour Him!

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

Dr John Piper

While the church is charged with sharing the Gospel with a God-forsaking world, not everyone within the church is called to be an evangelist. In fact, where most people are gifted or skilled often attracts very few accolades. Setting up chairs, turning on urns, handing out newsletters, distributing communion, welcoming newcomers, keeping the notice board up-to-date, all seems far too “Capernaum-ish”. Movies have been made of martyrs, apostles, preachers, church-planters, but who would make a movie about a church-creche worker looking after babies so that their mothers can have some respite to worship God uninterrupted???

It takes a special grace from God to be able to do anything for Him in the church. For the apostle Paul, this grace was a preaching gift-



*‡ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace,
which was given me by the working of his power.*

Eph. 3:7

Paul wrote to the Roman believers that God enabled people to do various acts of service because He graced them-

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:

Rom. 12:6a

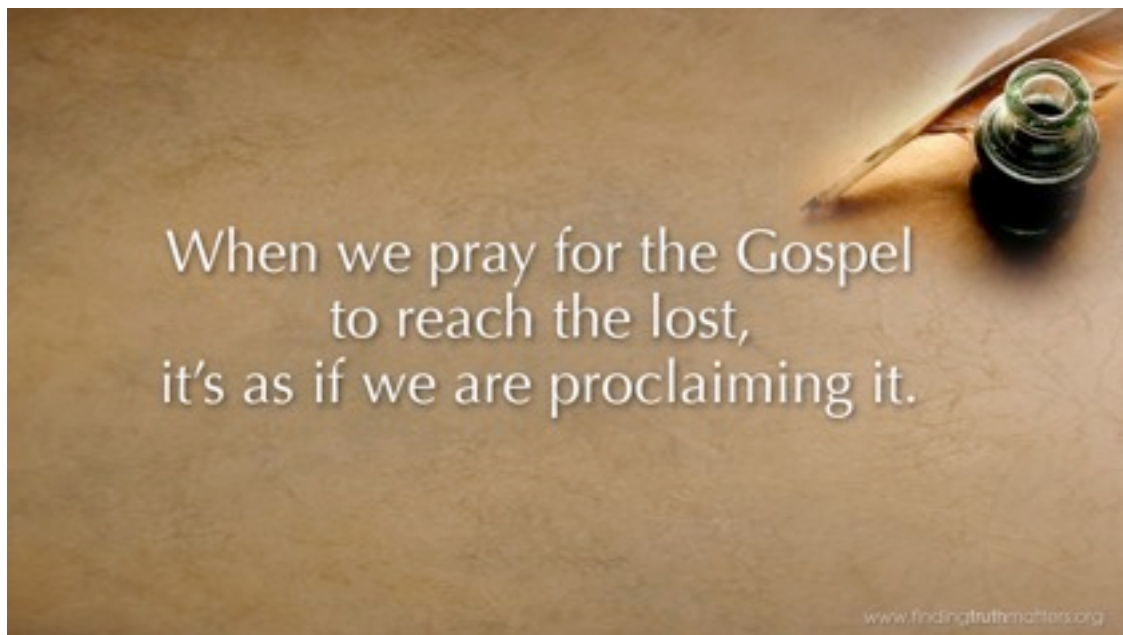
But when we work together with our various gifts, talents, abilities and resources we are able to live purposefully for the Cause of Christ in a way that results in others coming to know Christ.

*from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with
which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body
grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Eph. 4:16

There are some of us who are especially gifted with evangelism. These are the ones who proclaim the Gospel. But Dr. John Dickson, from the Centre For Public Christianity in Sydney, notes from his study of the New Testament that when we *pray* for the Gospel to be effective, it is as though *we* are proclaiming it. When we provide for the Gospel to go forth, it is as if *we* are proclaiming it.

You may feel like you're in Capernaum and thereby missing out on fame, wealth, or power. I wonder how many people in Capernaum truly appreciated the ministry of Jesus they were receiving each week? But God sometimes ordains that we give our lives for Him in places just like Capernaum. Local churches are often a type of Capernaum. What might surprise us in the end though is to discover that God actually gives us the very things we thought we were turning down by choosing to give our lives for the Cause of Christ in a place like Capernaum. And at that moment we will realise that giving our lives for the Cause of Christ was not only worth it - it was worth a whole lot more!



Dr. Andrew Corbett, 4th January 2011, Legana Tasmania
<http://www.findingtruthmatters.org>