



## **THE CROSS AND THE CHURCH**

### **1 Corinthians 16:5-24**

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 16. This morning we come to this last part of the book of 1 Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 16:5-24. And it's one of those passages that, when you're reading your Bible, you can come to it, and just kind of skip over it if you're not careful. You've got all kinds of greetings and messages and travel plans described here, and it can all seem somewhat irrelevant to us 2000 years after it was written. After all, what do Paul's travel plans two centuries ago have to do with our lives today? And we don't really know Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, and we're not about to greet them with a holy kiss either, or anyone else for that matter!

But a passage like we're about to read gives us a wonderful window into the relationships between churches that existed in the first century. Chapters like these, just like we saw last week with giving at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 16, are reminders to us that the church in any one location is part of a much bigger picture and a much bigger plan, in which God is working in many different churches, among many different people, in many different ways, for the spread of His gospel and the glory of His name.

So what I want us to do this morning is read this text, and then based on this text, to pause and think together about what God has done in this church through this book over the past seven months that we've been studying it together. And then I want us to step back and remember the much bigger picture that we're a part of as The Church at Brook Hills.

So let's start by reading the text: 1 Corinthians 16:5-24.

*I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

*When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.*

*Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.*

*Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.*

*Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.*

*The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*

*I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

I shared with you seven months ago how during a retreat we had with our elders, the Lord had clearly said to us, “I want you to walk together through the book of 1 Corinthians. To see this church with all of its struggles 2000 years ago, and to learn from it what I want to do in this church 2000 years later.” And from the very beginning, we saw the centrality of the cross of Christ in the church. We saw how it forms us as the church, how it humbles us and satisfies us and unifies us and transforms us and assures us and compels us.

We have seen the centrality of the cross and The Church at Brook Hills. And so we get to the end of this letter, and we read verses 13-14, where Paul gives five exhortations back-to-back-to-back-to-back-to-back that I think summarize all we’ve learned in this book about what the cross compels us to do.

### **May we stand firm in this culture.**

And I put two prayers, I suppose you could call them, or hopes, that are in my heart for this church as we close our journey through this book. One is this prayer, this hope: May we stand firm in this culture. Paul says to the church at Corinth in first-century culture, “*Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*”

#### **Preaching the cross and trusting God’s wisdom.**

And I believe God is saying the same thing to The Church at Brook Hills in twenty-first century culture today. Amidst a rapidly shifting moral landscape, even amidst a rapidly shifting church landscape, may we stand firm in this culture. In all these ways, preaching the cross and trusting God’s wisdom. We saw this in the opening chapters of this book. May we preach the cross of Christ with power and with trust in the wisdom of God that confounds the supposed wisdom of this world. What we preach, what we believe is foolishness to the world around us, but it is what saves us and unites together and leads us in the church. May we stand firm, preaching the cross and trusting God’s wisdom.

#### **Glorifying God through purity in our body.**

May we stand firm in this culture, glorifying God through purity in our body. And I use “body” here on two levels. One, corporately through discipline and restoration. What we saw in Chapter 5 and the beginning of Chapter 6 is that we must be serious about church discipline and restoration in the body of Christ. We spent multiple weeks talking about how we must do this in our faith family for our good, for others’ good, and ultimately for God’s glory in the body of Christ.

And then we spent multiple weeks in the end of Chapter 6, and then into Chapter 7, where we were challenged to glorify God through purity in our body individually as men and women, in sexuality, marriage, and singleness. "*Do you now know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? Your body is not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*" Do you remember how God so timed us to read these chapters this summer when the Supreme Court was considering and then passing down godless rulings about sexuality, marriage, and singleness. God, help us to stand firm in this culture, glorifying God with our bodies.

### **Worshipping God in our work and our play.**

And then, worshipping God in our work and our play. We've seen idolatry in 1 Corinthians and its effect on the church, so we paused to consider idolatry in our own lives, in our work, and even in sports, particularly college football. This is a sermon I would encourage you to go back and listen to periodically to guard your heart. And pertaining to work, this is leading to a conference that we're doing November 22-23 on the "Gospel at Work", which I really hope you'll be a part of. I think registration costs for that increase after the end of this month, this Thursday, so let me encourage you sign up for that soon. Worshipping God in our work. In all of this, may God help us to be watchful, to stand firm in this culture.

When Paul says to "*act like men*," the picture there is maturity. It's not men as opposed to women, but men as opposed to children. John Piper said, "Christians in the West are weakened by wimpy worldviews. And wimpy worldviews make wimpy Christians." God, may this not be said of The Church at Brook Hills in the days ahead.

## **May we show love in the church.**

May we be strong in this culture and may we show love in the church. "*Let all that you do be done in love.*" What a great summary of 1 Corinthians! "*Let all that you do be done in love.*" Love for one another, which is rooted in love for Christ. Verse 22, "*If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.*"

### **In the ways we use our liberties and the way we spend our lives.**

May we show love for Christ and for one another in the church in the ways we use our liberties and the way we spend our lives. To build up others in Christ: 1 Corinthians 8. To lead others to Christ: 1 Corinthians 9.

### **Through our use of spiritual gifts and a pattern of selfless giving.**

May we show love through our use of spiritual gifts and a pattern of selfless giving. Remember that the love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) was sandwiched in between Paul's explanation and discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

### **In our gathering for worship and our scattering as witnesses.**

All leading to what we saw about giving in the beginning of 1 Corinthians 16 last week. May we show love in our gathering for worship and our scattering as witnesses. In our gathering for worship, we want the love of Christ to be clear, particularly in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11). For those of you who are here and you're not Christians, this is our prayer for you today. Our prayer is that as we talk about the church, that you would see the love of Christ. Even in just a little bit, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, that you would see the center of our life together is the body and blood of Christ.

And they may seem weird to you, but here's why it's not weird. Here's why it's wonderful. God is holy, and He created human beings good and to live in fellowship with Him forever. However, we rebelled against the commands of God, and instead of fellowship with God, sin came into the world and with it, brought death. We were severed from our relationship with God, and to this day, our sin continues to separate us from a holy God. There was nothing we could do to earn our way back to Him. But God, in His mercy, saw our hopeless plight and sent His Son, Jesus, to earth. Jesus lived the perfect life we could not live, yet He died the death we deserved to die in order that, through faith in Him, our relationship with God would be restored. It is only through faith in Christ's work on our behalf that we are saved. This is the love of God manifested fully in Christ.

We want the love of Christ to be clear in our gathering for worship and our scattering as witnesses. The cross of Christ compels us to make disciples. Not just to sing about and celebrate this reality in this room, but to leave this room every week, compelled to proclaim the gospel with urgency and to live out the gospel with authenticity.

The cross of Christ compels us to make disciples, and the cross compels us to multiply churches. "*Our Lord, come!*" Paul cries at the end of this book. May that cry be our cry. We don't have a lot of time here. Jesus is coming back any minute. So let's give our lives, centered around the cross of Christ. Let's give this church, compelled by the love of Christ to spread the good news of the crucified and risen King wherever, however He leads, no matter how radical, sacrificial, or risk-taking it might seem.

And we have much to think about what that looks like in the days ahead, but on this day, I want us to pause and look back. To look back at the last few years, and the way God has systematically scattered many in our faith family to make disciples and multiply churches in places as close as south Birmingham and East Lake to places in the Northwestern, Midwestern, and Northeastern United States. As Paul talks about relationships between the church at Corinth and churches in different parts of Asia, I want us to remember the relationships we have with churches in different parts of America. These are brothers and sisters who once sat weekly in this room with us, who have now been sent out from among us. Over the last couple of years, in addition to church planting teams we've sent out to North Africa and Central Asia and East Asia and the Middle East, we've also sent out church planters and their families to different parts of North America. Let's continue to pray for them and pray for men and women in this faith family that the Lord may be leading to join them.

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